

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 29, 2018

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
House Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear NDAA Conferees:

We write to urge you to include SEC. 1099E of H.R. 5515, the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), in the final conference report of the NDAA. This section includes language that would place on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, the names of the 74 crewmembers who died in the sinking of the *USS Frank E. Evans*. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

As you may be aware, the *USS Frank E. Evans* served multiple tours off the coast of Vietnam during the Vietnam War. In 1969, it was ordered to withdraw from gunfire support off the coast and participate in the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) exercise Sea Spirit. It was scheduled to return to the Vietnam coast after the exercise. While conducting maneuvers with the Australian and New Zealand navies outside of the combat zone, it collided with an aircraft carrier, the *HMAS Melbourne*, resulting in the deaths of 74 U.S. sailors. The ship and majority of the deceased sailors had previously provided naval gun fire off the coast of Vietnam, including during the Tet Offensive.

In order for a servicemember to have his or her name added to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, DC, certain criteria must be satisfied. One criteria for eligibility is that the servicemember must have died while participating in, or providing direct support to, a combat mission immediately en route or returning from a target within the defined combat zone. The *USS Frank E. Evans* had just exited the combat zone, and all indications are that the ship would re-enter the combat zone after the exercise. In fact, the other ships in the Evan's group returned

immediately from the exercise to the combat zone. Moreover, President Nixon stated that such exercises provided support to war efforts in Vietnam, and according to the State Department historian, SEATO included Vietnam as a territory under SEATO protection.

On May 24, 2018, the House overwhelmingly passed H.R. 5515, which included an amendment, adopted by voice vote, authored by Representative Kevin Cramer directing the Secretary of Defense to have the names of the 74 crewmembers who died in the sinking of the *USS Frank E. Evans* placed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall. Similar amendments were filed by Senators Hoeven, Heitkamp and McCaskill as well as Senator Booker filing an amendment with Senators Menendez and Schumer as cosponsors during the Senate's floor consideration of the FY 2019 NDAA, but failed to receive a vote.

The 74 sailors who perished did so while serving our country during the Vietnam War. We believe their sacrifice and that of their families is worth not only our mention, but also the high honor of being memorialized forever on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC. This initiative is supported by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, AMVETS, Atlanta Vietnam Veterans Business Association, and the Frank E. Evans Association.

Therefore, we respectfully request that the NDAA Conference Committee include SEC. 1099E of the House-passed NDAA, the language to engrave the names of the 74 crew members who died in the sinking of the *USS Frank E. Evans* on the Vietnam Wall, in the final version of the NDAA. Thank you for your consideration.

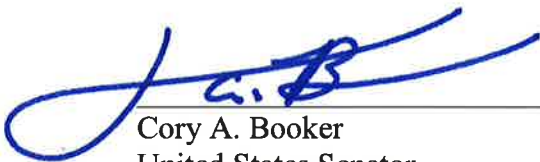
Sincerely,



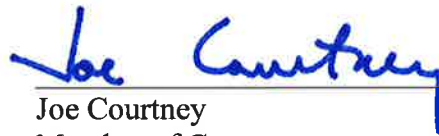
John Hoeven
United States Senator



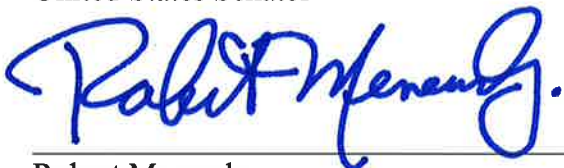
Kevin Cramer
Member of Congress



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Joe Courtney
Member of Congress



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Jody Hice
Member of Congress



Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator



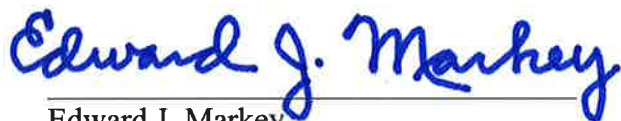
Adam Schiff
Member of Congress



Claire McCaskill
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator