

Dicks Applauds Navy's Role in Kitsap

Kitsap Sun

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By Ed Friedrich

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BREMERTON “What about them SEALS?”

That’s how Norm Dicks opened his speech Tuesday at the Puget Sound Naval Bases Association’s annual membership drive kickoff breakfast. He was referring, of course, to the elite Navy team that freed Capt. Richard Phillips from pirates off the coast of Somalia on Sunday evening.

The U.S. congressman from Belfair told the sold-out crowd of 440 that the rescue demonstrated the growing importance of special forces.

“That’s one area we’re going to keep building up because when you’re dealing with non-state actors, you’ve got to have that capability,” he said.

Dicks said he agrees with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’ assessment that more funds should be directed toward weapons and training that are relevant to today’s conflicts. Gates proposed a \$534 billion defense budget last week that recommends billions of dollars for counterinsurgency efforts in conventional conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan, while cutting big-ticket high-tech weapons programs like the F-22 stealth fighter.

“We have to have the ability to deal with terrorists, people who hate us but aren’t part of a country,” Dicks said. “We have to prepare and buy the type of equipment for the wars we’re fighting today.”

The Puget Sound Naval Bases Association, with about 4,500 members, seeks to grow past 5,000 in its 63rd year, administrator Anna Welling said. Each year the group’s leaders visit the Washington, D.C., area to lobby Capitol Hill and Pentagon leaders for local Navy needs.

During the trip last month, they pushed for better travel regulations for Puget Sound Naval Shipyard employees, shipyard investments to meet modern maintenance demands, retaining shipyard employees, a new explosives-handling wharf at Bangor, and the Navy’s ability to use sonar as required.

“If you benefit from a healthy Navy, you should be a member,” said AnnaLee Todd, the group’s president.

Dicks told the group that Navy installations are helping Kitsap weather the economic recession. The state announced Tuesday that its unemployment rate jumped to 9.2 percent in March. Dicks countered that the shipyard will be hiring 500 more workers this year, raising the work force from 9,800 to 10,300.

“Thank goodness that we have these jobs and we’re growing more of these jobs here in Kitsap County,” he said, crediting the PSNBA for presenting the county’s case in D.C. and showing the Navy that the area cares about it.

“There’s a lot of good things happening in this community, and I’m proud that the Navy plays such a predominant role,” he said.



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