

opinion

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Letters to the Editor, *SOUNDINGS*
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About this issue

We need new flooring in all three of our bathrooms. Some of our window screens need to be repaired or replaced. The gutters overflow with pine needles, pinecones and leaves. A woodpecker has left his calling card above one of our second floor windows.

I've been meaning to get to all of those projects for at least a few months. Family, work, school and soccer seem to always get in the way. Some weeks I barely have enough time to cut the grass, let alone replace the floor in three bathrooms.

So there's no question that I need help. But I've never known where to turn for any of those things. I've heard nightmare stories from neighbors and friends about how they've hired a contractor to come do a job at their house only to have that contractor not finish the job or make the situation worse. In the past, I've always turned to our real estate agent for suggestions, but since my wife and I bought our house four years ago and haven't sent our agent any more business since, that seems a bit extreme.

Enter Cmdr. Michael Crockett. The 18-year Navy officer had many of the same conundrums I did, but instead of running off to the soccer field (like I do), he decided to do something about it.

As you can read on page 9, Crockett created JobSiteJoe.com, a place where homeowners can find reliable contractors and vice versa. It helps take the guesswork of opening the phone book and randomly picking a contractor.

The idea is a good one and I hope it takes off. I will be checking it out in hopes I can find someone to inexpensively put my house back in order. If you're in the same boat as me, you should check it out, too.

Crockett's foray into the world of the Internet reminded me our service members work at much more than what they do in uniform. While most of the time they likely do that to help make ends meet, there are entrepreneurs out there trying to turn bright ideas into maximum profit. If you're one of those folks, or know someone who is, drop us a line at soundings@militarynews.com. We'd love to hear about more stories like that of JobSiteJoe.com and its creator.

Jim Jim Van Slyke
Editor

Brace yourself

Defense bill could have huge impact on Hampton Roads' economy

If you are a fan of the Navy and live here in Hampton Roads, you should be happy to hear that USS Wisconsin is almost assuredly a permanent resident of downtown Norfolk. But other than that, the future looks a bit haze gray for the Navy in this area.

The Defense spending bill, passed last week by Congress and expected to be approved by President Bush, is a clear indication the U.S. military's focus is on the boots on the ground and not those on the deck plate.

The bill adds 30,000 soldiers and 5,000 Marines to the active-duty force while cutting 12,000 sailors from the Navy. However, the cut was requested by the sea service in an effort to reduce personnel costs. The Navy would like to use technology to allow ships to be staffed with fewer sailors.

The plan to retire USS John F. Kennedy and reduce the Navy's carrier fleet from 12 to 11 was also approved. The Kennedy's retirement will almost certainly impact Hampton Roads. Florida politicians want to move a carrier from Norfolk to Naval Station Mayport, Fla., to replace the Kennedy. If this happens, Naval Station Norfolk, now

home to five aircraft carriers, could instead only house three. USS George Washington, currently homeported in Norfolk, is slated to move to Japan in 2008.

The Hampton Roads Planning District Commission estimates losing one carrier would drain 3,000 jobs and \$225 million per year from the Hampton Roads economy. Losing two carriers would hurt twice as much. Of course, when USS George H.W. Bush joins the fleet in 2008 it could be ported in Norfolk. But most initial Navy reports have it going to the West Coast.

So for those keeping score at home, the Navy will be providing a much smaller piece of the local economic pie within the next few years. Fewer personnel overall plus two fewer carriers equals a Hampton Roads economy that needs to rely less on Navy dollars.

But don't stick your head in a hole yet. There is good news coming out of Washington, D.C. The bill also allocates a pay raise for the military. Of course, it's a bit smaller at 2.2 percent than in recent years, but at least it's not flat. Recent raises have averaged around 4 percent.

The bill also sets a cap of 36 percent on "payday loans." These loans are often tar-

getted to young service members and their families. Currently, some loans have an interest of 500 percent or more. The only downside is that some loan companies have said they can't exist with rates so low. One even decided recently to not loan money at all to service members and their families in hopes the military would raise a stink and pester state and national governments.

There's also \$2.9 billion in the bill allocated towards buying 20 more F-22A Raptor fighter-bombers. It's more than likely some of those planes will be sent to Langley Air Force Base in Hampton.

The best news for local Navy folks is the bill permits the construction of seven new ships, including an attack submarine to be partially built at Northrop Grumman Newport News. It also allocates \$739 million toward the next class of aircraft carrier, which will begin construction in Newport News in 2008.

So did the Navy win or lose? The Navy, with new assets in the pike and smarter user of manpower, likely wins. But the shifting of carriers and downsizing of manpower means the Hampton Roads economy is not so lucky.

Letters to the Editor

Say no to celebrity boycott

To the editor:

This is in response to Debi Ketner's column, "Let's hit anti-war celebrities where it hurts"

As a frequent reader of *Soundings*, I appreciate Ketner's direct approach to stating her opinion. In the case of her recent editorial, however, I'm having a hard time following her logic that celebrities who oppose war are by default anti-military? For clarification, there is an important distinction to be made about being anti-war. Simply put, being anti-war does not mean these celebrities are anti-military.

Quite the contrary, in many cases, the core of their anti-war sentiment stems from their patriotic support of America's sons and daughters in uniform. More precisely, their anti-war sentiment stems from seeing the military employed in Iraq (not Afghanistan) — a war that they, and more than half of our country and most of the world, deem to be an irresponsible use of American power. In short, these celebrities are angry with

the president for what they feel is a reckless use of the military. Whether they are right or wrong in holding this opinion is certainly debatable, but it stands clear that their opposition to the war in Iraq is actually a defense of the men and women in the military.

I am a combat experienced veteran of four wars and I have come to appreciate a few things about war. War is sometimes necessary but it is never glorious nor should it ever be celebrated. I am proud to have had the opportunity to defend the United States Constitution and with that, the right of free speech for all. I am thankful there are folks with the courage, like Ketner and the Dixie Chicks, to stand for what they believe in. With that in mind, I won't be joining Ketner's boycott of anti-war celebrities.

— Danny O'Doblan
Norfolk

Where are the leaders?

To the editor:

It is time for the military to

rise up and be heard. It's now more evident than ever that the current administration has bungled things in Iraq. As a Republican, it pains me to say that, but facts are facts. We are fighting a losing battle there and things seem to only be getting worse. There is no end-action plan and our service members are still getting killed and wounded.

I understand that speaking up in the military usually results in career suicide, but aren't lives more important than careers? I would hate to think a general

or colonel is keeping his mouth shut about how bad things are over there so he can retire with his full benefits.

The most respected military leaders have always been the ones who stand up for their troops, even if it means angering the suits in Washington, D.C. Where are the MacArthurs of today? Where is our Eisenhower? Where is the leader who will not be afraid of the Bush administration?

— E. William Sexson
Virginia Beach

