



One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

July 2, 2020

Admiral Karl Schultz
Commandant
U.S. Coast Guard
2703 Martin Luther King Jr., S.E.
Washington, DC 20593

Dear Admiral Schultz:

I write to request that the U.S. Coast Guard prohibit public displays of the Confederate battle flag at all Coast Guard installations, cutters, boats, aircraft, and government-owned housing. The U.S. Navy and the Marine Corps have already decided to prohibit displays of the Confederate battle flag from all of their military facilities—and it is past time that the U.S. Coast Guard follow suit.¹

Current Coast Guard policy on this issue gives commanders discretion in the handling of Confederate battle flag displays. I urge the Service to instead ban the display of the flag and ensure discipline for military members or civilian employees who disobey such a ban.

In a recent letter to Marines, the Commandant of the U.S. Marines Corps, General David Berger, acknowledged that he was “mindful of the feelings of pain and rejection of those who inherited the cultural memory and present effects of the scourge of slavery in our country... and [that] the symbol has shown it has the power to inflame feelings of division.”² I am perplexed at the Coast Guard’s hesitation to do the same.

I have long been a staunch opponent of public displays of the Confederate battle flag. As a Mississippian and an African American, the flag symbolizes a history of slavery, segregation, and racial discrimination that continues to haunt this country and greatly offends many African Americans who still face racism and bigotry to this day. This is the reason I have refused to display the Mississippi state flag with its Confederate markings outside my office in the Rayburn House Office Building since my arrival in the U.S. Congress in 1993. I am glad that, as of this week, my home state will no longer fly a flag with Confederate markings, and I look forward to

¹ Paul D. Shinkman, “Navy to Ban Confederate Flag Following Marine Corps Order,” *U.S. News and World Report* (June 9, 2020), <https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2020-06-09/navy-to-ban-confederate-flag-following-new-marine-corps-order>.

² Letter from General David Berger, Commandant of the U.S. Marines Corps, to the U.S. Marine Corps (April 20, 2020), <https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/CMC-Letter-R1.pdf>.

proudly flying a new flag that more accurately reflects the values of the community I am honored to represent in Congress. The changes in Mississippi go to show that meaningful progress can happen when those in power display the courage needed to listen and adapt.

I would like to also echo a powerful point that Senator Tammy Duckworth raised in a recent letter to you about this matter:

Honoring the “lost cause” of those who waged war against the United States of America, or defending the right of an individual State to allow its residents to own, sell and kill fellow Americans as property, has no place in our Nation, especially the U.S. Armed Forces which waged a deadly war to eliminate the barbaric practice of slavery.³

The Confederate battle flag is a symbol of hate, bigotry, and division—plain and simple. A Service truly committed to recruiting and retaining African Americans and fostering a culture of justice and equity simply cannot continue to allow the display of such a symbol. That is why I urge you to immediately prohibit the public display of this flag within the Coast Guard.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Chairman

³ Letter from Senator Tammy Duckworth to Commandant Karl Schultz, U.S. Coast Guard, Department of Homeland Security (June 8, 2020), <https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/20.06.08%20-%20Senator%20Duckworth%20Letter%20to%20Coast%20Guard%20-%20Prohibit%20Display%20of%20Confederate%20Battle%20Flag.pdf>.