

March 29, 2021

The Honorable Thomas Harker
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350

Dear Acting Secretary Harker:

I write in support of utilizing the USS Bonhomme Richard in the waters off Florida as an artificial reef. I believe that preserving the ship as an artificial reef would be a fitting way to honor the brave sailors who served on the USS Bonhomme Richard, including those who placed themselves in danger to save lives and battle the fire that ravaged the vessel last July.

The State of Florida has the unique experience and capacity in creating artificial reefs. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) maintains one of the most active and effective artificial reef programs in the country. As of October 2020, the FWC has masterfully created more than 3,700 artificial reefs in Florida's waters using best practices and science to sink vessels and other structures safely, and in a manner of the utmost regard for wildlife and the environment. These reefs are ecologically and economically important. Artificial reefs serve as habitat for native reef fish and help maintain fish stocks, supporting Florida's robust tourism and recreational fishing economies. Additionally, as the USS Bonhomme Richard is one of only eight Wasp-class amphibious assault ships ever built, the ship would offer a unique diving experience.

According to reports, the U.S. Navy currently intends to scrap the USS Bonhomme Richard at a cost of approximately \$30 million. The State of Florida has indicated that utilizing the vessel as an artificial reef would be far less costly and time consuming, and would certainly be much more economically and ecologically productive.

I stand ready to facilitate discussion and coordination between you and the State of Florida should you wish to pursue this potentially mutually beneficial effort. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator