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Amenities:

[Extemporaneous acknowledgement of FRA National Executive Secretary Chuck Calkins and other attendees.]

Introduction: Know Where True North Is . . . And Help Others Find It:

Earlier this summer, the National Capital Area Council of the Boy Scouts sent me a sheet of paper titled "Thoughts for a Strong Life." Organized according to no discernible pattern, this single page contains a list of 140 brief thoughts, sayings, and reminders on a wide range of topics. You can envision it as a more mature version of the "Everything I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" posters we used to see a few years ago.

Some thoughts simply highlight the scouting philosophy: "Do your best." "Be self reliant." "Be prepared."

Some mention skills that every scout should master: "Know how to tie the square knot, and three other knots." "Learn CPR." "Know how to float in water."

Others are specific camping safety rules: "Keep flames away from tents." "Always purify drinking water." "Cooking with soapy pots and pans is bad."

Quite a few offer universal advice on interpersonal relations: "Improve the situation by listening." "Be friendly-friendship is a mirror." "Help other people at all times."

All in all, the list is a neat, but somewhat quirky, mixture of ideas. And as I read it, I was struck by how many of the thoughts have more general applications than are first apparent. "Never dive into unknown waters" is a good rule to keep from breaking your neck as a 12-year-old at summer camp, but it also counsels prudence in all manner of other murky circumstances. The sanitation rule of thumb, "Always dig cat holes at least 200 feet from water, campsites and trails" contains broadly relevant wisdom for dealing

with all the messes we make. And the mnemonic device for what to do when lost: "S-T-O-P: Stay calm, Think, Observe, Plan" can help bewildered leaders in any situation.

One of these maxims with broader implications seems particularly pertinent to the work of the Fleet Reserve Association: "Know where true north is . . . and help others find it."

It occurs to me that each part of that aphorism calls to mind its own reason why the Fleet Reserve Association is such a valuable partner to the sea services.

"Knowing where true north is" speaks to a constant awareness of your goals and standards-not merely being able to find true north when you realize you're lost, but knowing where true north is all the time to keep from getting lost in the first place. This idea speaks to the FRA's consistent voice in serving the enlisted men and women of the sea services.

"True north"-as opposed to magnetic north-reminds us to be uncompromising in matters of principle and not to accept vague movement in approximately the right direction when we can strive for decisive action towards a specific goal.

If you're lost in the woods, any general notion of north that is more north than east or west might be good enough to help you find your way to a highway. If, however, you are on a ship and trying to reach a particular destination-or you are intent upon navigating a difficult channel-approximate ideas of north can make you miss your landfall or run you aground. You had better know exactly where true north lies. Even a single degree makes a big difference over the course of a long voyage.

Similarly, when it comes to formulating and executing public policies affecting our enlisted forces, generally benevolent intentions to provide adequate compensation and benefits are not enough without a detailed understanding of the underlying issues. FRA's meticulous analysis and careful monitoring of legislative and budget processes have been enormously valuable in making sure that general notions of north ultimately find expression in the precise percentages, dollars, and legislative language that are based on true north. I appreciate your diligence on behalf of Coast Guard people.

"Where true north is" reminds us that our goal is an external objective reality, whose validity is independent of our feelings about it. In season and out of season, regardless of the political mood of the country, it is always true that our readiness depends on our enlisted people, it is always true that we have a national obligation to look out for them, and it is always right for the FRA to provide its broad range of valuable services.

"And help others find it" cuts two ways. It speaks both to the public education you undertake and the services you provide to your members. You've demonstrated your awareness that the principal purpose in knowing something important is using that knowledge to benefit others.

FRA has been about the business of knowing where true north is and helping others to find it for seventy five years. I congratulate you, I thank you, and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today about true north.

### A Key Element of True North: Quality of Life Comparability.

Even many experienced sailors-mariners who have spent years at sea and taught dozens of younger shipmates how to trace an imaginary line across the northern sky from the ladle of the Big Dipper until they encounter the North Star-are not aware that Polaris, the North Star, is not a star at all. It is actually a cluster of stars.

Stand by for a short astronomy lesson.

This cluster includes a system known as a spectroscopic binary, which is a term used to describe two stars that revolve around a common center of gravity and are so close together that they cannot be distinguished by telescope. Only very special radial velocity observations allow us to tell that there are in fact two stars at that point on the celestial sphere. In addition to the two stars in the spectroscopic binary, Polaris includes a third star, a special kind of a star known as Cepheid, which is a pulsating star with regular light variations. Together, these three stars comprise the major navigational star of the second magnitude we call Polaris. They move through the night sky as one body. For the QM's in the audience, there is no parallax error between their altitudes. Even with the most powerful telescope, they look like one star. But they are really three stars.

I offer this little astronomy lesson to make a serious point about military readiness.

When we point to Polaris and say, "Look at that star right over there," we think we are pointing to one star, but we are really pointing at three. And when we talk about "Readiness" we think we are talking about one subject, but we are really talking about a large center of gravity around which many important issues are clustered.

I am here today to talk about one of those issues in that cluster. The issue is comparable quality of life across all five armed services. Comparability is like that little pulsating star, the Cepheid, in the midst of Polaris. It is indistinguishable from the overall cluster, but its effects are widely felt.

Please note that I distinguish between equity and comparability. The law requires equity, and we have it. An E-5 with over six years of service gets the same base pay regardless of service branch. All E-7's with dependents in Washington, DC, not in government housing are eligible for the same housing allowance.

But what we do not have is comparability. Do all E-5's have the same opportunity to pursue off-duty education? Are they eligible to receive comparable re-enlistment bonuses? Do they have the same opportunity to live in government housing? Are their families equally likely to be sent out on the economy to find health care? Are incentive pays comparable across the five services for comparably arduous duty? The answer to all of these questions is, "No."

A few years ago, a working group at the Pentagon was investigating quality of life issues for DOD recruiters. One official offered a presentation on how difficult life is for

remotely assigned recruiters. He had a fairly extensive list: no access to commissaries, exchanges, or other amenities; high housing costs; out-of-pocket health care expenses; and so on. The DOD members were quite properly concerned that any of their troops should have to put up with such conditions, but the Coast Guard representative shrugged his shoulders and said, "Sounds like your typical Coast Guard unit to me." The sad part is that he was right. It's a fact that quality-of-life standards that would appall DOD services are normal for Coast Guard personnel.

I have observed that systemic process flaws impede the fair formulation of the annual Coast Guard budget and prevent comparable treatment of Coast Guard people. Many DoD military workforce decisions that impose financial obligations on all five armed services are reached without adequate attention to their impact on the one service outside of the Defense Department.

Whenever congressional or administration decisions on issues like compensation, health care, housing programs create costs greater than the levels estimated early in the transportation budget build process, the Coast Guard either absorbs the unforeseen costs out of hide or is forced to decide not to match benefits provided to DOD personnel. In the first instance, our already precarious readiness degrades further; in the second, the unintended compensation and benefits gap between Coast Guard and DOD personnel expands.

Either way, my sailor loses. If the benefits are mandated, the sailor gets the benefit but pays for it in higher optempo or less reliable equipment. If the benefits are not mandated, they have an excellent chance of simply being added to the overgrown list of benefits that DOD armed services can offer their people that the Coast Guard cannot provide for our people-people who endure the same hardships, accept the same family separations, and face the same hazards.

What's particularly frustrating is that it is a structural process-and not a conscious policy decision-that has caused such significant damage to our people and our readiness.

Let me give you an example. As I speak to you today, the FRA web site has a "legislative alert" posted regarding the upcoming conference between the House and Senate Armed Services Committees to work out the differences between the two versions of the FY 2001 DOD Authorization Act. Everybody in the national security community is following the progress of this bill-as well they should.

Less closely followed, however, is the progress of the transportation appropriation bill, a bill that has also been forwarded to its conference committee and contains the Coast Guard's budget for next year. And not followed at all outside the Coast Guard is the consequence of having both bills pass in approximately their current forms. As matters now stand, the Coast Guard would face an unfunded liability of about thirty three million dollars because of provisions in the defense authorization act regarding important health care and standard of living issues like TRICARE Prime Remote, eliminating certain TRICARE Prime co-payments, reducing out-of-pocket housing expenses, and implementing Basic Allowance for Housing for E-4's assigned to sea duty.

All of these are worthy projects, and some of them, like TRICARE Prime Remote, are even more important to the Coast Guard than they are to the other armed services because of where our people typically serve. I would love to see Coast Guard families receive the benefits of these provisions. However, their enactment in law presents a real problem because unless the Coast Guard is provided the funds to cover these entitlements, I will have to decide what Coast Guard services to diminish to cover that loss of funds.

We had the same situation last year. The Coast Guard's appropriation was already signed, sealed, and delivered when the conferees on the DOD authorization bill agreed to accelerate the implementation of the Basic Allowance for Housing. My budget was already the law of the land, but another law came along requiring me to spend money that wasn't in my budget. I welcomed this benefit for our people, but I simply did not have the fifteen million dollars it cost. Fifteen million dollars may not sound like a lot of money in the DOD context, but it is a lot of money to the Coast Guard. I had no choice but to take the money out of other operating accounts, curtail some operations, and work to find relief through supplemental appropriations.

At other times, the DOD confers additional benefits-enlistment and retention bonuses, special pays, educational opportunities, and so forth-on their members in ways that do not legally obligate the Coast Guard to match them. I don't begrudge the DOD enlisted people these benefits for a moment, but I firmly insist that Coast Guard people should also get them.

Situations like this perpetually squeeze our people between the rock of unfunded mandates that exacerbate the readiness gap-and the hard place of unmatched benefits that exacerbate the quality of life gap.

As I see it, two things need to happen to solve this problem.

First, we need to fill a policy void by declaring a clear administration and congressional resolve to make compensation and benefits for Coast Guard personnel equal on all points-housing, medical, special pay and allowances, education opportunity, enlistment incentives, retention incentives-to what our DOD counterparts receive. The absence of an affirmative policy on comparability can have the same effect as a policy against comparability.

Second, we need to establish and refine coordinating mechanisms to ensure Defense workforce decisions get reflected in the Coast Guard budget. Otherwise, we perpetuate an inefficiency in which budget measures intended to promote DOD readiness actually detract from Coast Guard readiness. Nobody consciously imposes this burden on the Coast Guard, but the current process allows and even guarantees that it will happen.

#### Conclusion:

The connection between quality of life and readiness is clear.

For my part, I've been working to educate high ranking administration officials and our Congressional overseers on this issue. In addition, my staff has facilitated meetings between Transportation and Defense budget officials both to increase DOT's understanding of how military entitlements are built and to incorporate better estimates into the transportation appropriation. We're doing what we can.

But I need help, and that brings me to your part.

I am asking for your attention to this issue. Learn about the forces affecting this star within the stellar cluster known as readiness. See what the implications are for the enlisted families you serve. Help work towards an appropriate solution. Continue to work with us to serve our military workforce.

The enlisted men and women of the Coast Guard have counted on you for seventy five years, and you have upheld their trust every time.

Knowing that your heart is where my heart is-centered on the welfare of the men and women to whom America has entrusted its maritime security and supremacy-I am confident that we can establish the comparability that fairness demands.

These are very subtle issues that contribute to the erosion of our readiness. I insist that we understand them, that we educate the impact players so they understand them, and that we work together to guarantee comparability.

If there is anyone in town I know I can count on to be there to help me, it's the FRA. For that I'm extremely grateful.

I remain humbled by your service to our country and honored to have been with you today.

Semper Paratus.

