

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 21, 2025

Admiral Kevin E. Lunday
Acting Commandant
U.S. Coast Guard
1790 Ash Street SE
Washington D.C. 20032

Admiral Lunday:

After repeated attempts to get information and secure a meeting – none of which have been meaningfully answered – we are now writing to demand clear, immediate answers about the Coast Guard’s abrupt decision to relocate a rescue helicopter from Newport to North Bend. This sudden move has created significant uncertainty about the future of the Newport Air Facility and the Coast Guard’s commitment to operating there. We cannot compromise search-and-rescue coverage in Newport, and we need the Coast Guard to make that unequivocally clear. Without action, this decision will cost lives.

The Oregon coast is home to some of the most challenging ocean conditions in the country, and Newport experiences some of the coldest, roughest water on this stretch of the coastline. For generations, Newport families and fishermen lived with the consequences of slow response times, until a series of preventable tragedies in the 1980s made clear that the Coast Guard’s presence in North Bend – 90 miles away – could not meet the community’s needs. In response, community leaders and state and federal officials came together to establish the Newport Air Facility to ensure people working on these waters can get help when they need it. The same conditions that drove that decision decades ago are still present today.

Yet this community has repeatedly had to defend its right to basic rescue coverage. In 2014, the Coast Guard moved to shutter the Newport Air Facility, and only sustained pressure from the City, our fishing fleet, the state, and Oregon’s Congressional Delegation kept it operating. Now, with reports that the Coast Guard has moved a helicopter out of Newport, the community is left wondering whether it’s facing down the same risks it fought so hard to address.

As a reminder, federal law sets clear requirements before the Coast Guard can close or significantly reduce operations at an air facility, including ensuring sufficient search-and-rescue coverage, conducting public meetings and notifying Congress. If the Coast Guard is considering any broader reduction in its presence in Newport, we expect those procedures to be followed. The removal of the helicopter, carried out with no explanation or consultation, has only heightened concern that broader changes may already be underway.

Compounding the alarm is the growing concern that the Coast Guard will abandon its space at the Newport Municipal Airport to make way for other uses entirely. The impression is that

maritime safety and the lives of our fishermen, visitors and coastal residents are not a priority for the Coast Guard. If that is not the case, we need that said clearly and supported by action.

To understand the Coast Guard's plans on the central coast, we need answers as soon as possible. Dungeness crab season is about to begin, with more than 60 vessels – over 300 lives – heading out as early as December 12 to do one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. Those crews and their families need to know whether they can count on a timely Coast Guard response if something goes wrong. Given these risks, the Coast Guard must address the following questions:

- Why did the Coast Guard move the helicopter out of Newport, and what reasoning drove that decision?
- How is the Coast Guard ensuring adequate search-and-rescue coverage for the Newport area while the helicopter remains in North Bend, given that survival in these waters is often measured in minutes?
- When does the Coast Guard expect the helicopter to return to Newport, and what factors will it use to make that determination?
- What are the Coast Guard's estimated response times to incidents in Newport with the helicopter staged in North Bend?
- Is the Coast Guard considering any changes – either to the Newport Air Facility itself or surrounding property – that could affect search-and-rescue capabilities and what concrete information can you provide about those plans?
- What steps will the Coast Guard take to inform and engage local leaders, fishermen, and residents about future decisions affecting the facility and search-and-rescue coverage?

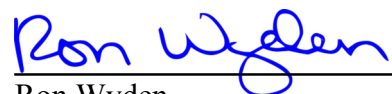
Given the unforgiving conditions on this coast, a delay of 30 to 45 minutes is the difference between a rescue and a body recovery. Lives quite literally depend on timely answers to these questions. We look forward to your prompt response and to maintaining a strong and constructive working relationship with the Coast Guard.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

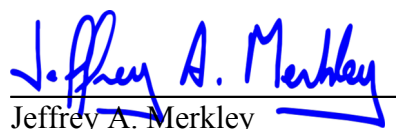
Sincerely,



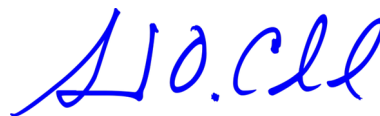
Val Hoyle
Member of Congress



Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Jeffrey A. Merkley in blue ink.

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Salud Carbajal in blue ink.

Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress