

GETTING READY TO PROTECT THE WORLD



Caption: Senator Esposito, donning protective head gear and flight vest, enjoys a tour of the USS Ronald Reagan during the recent RIMPAC exercises.

Many years ago, my father retired from the U.S. Navy after a rewarding 21-year career that capitalized on his talents as a chef. His cooking skills gave him the privilege of preparing delicious meals for the military's top officials on his tours of duty. Our family followed my dad around the country and the world, as do many Navy families. I lived in Washington, California, Virginia, Georgia, Florida, Cuba, Japan, and Italy. I was born at the Naval Station in Yokosuka, Japan, and graduated from high school in Oak Harbor, Washington near Whidbey Naval Air Station. The experience of growing up in different states and countries gave me a broad exposure, respect, and appreciation of the range in culture, lifestyle, and outlook. This has helped me as a senator to listen to and consider the diversity of interests in evaluating bills before the Legislature.

I recently had the honor of being invited to be on board the USS Ronald Reagan, which was the only carrier participating in this year's RIMPAC exercises. RIMPAC stands for "Rim of the Pacific Exercise", the world's largest international maritime exercise. The naval fleets of our Pacific Rim allies participate in this event. Its purpose is to promote regional stability through enhanced interoperability among Pacific military forces. Honing combat techniques increases our military readiness to deal with potential conflicts in the western hemisphere. Two of the hot spots in the military theatre are the long-standing threats between mainland China and Taiwan, and North Korea.

The U.S., Canada, and Australia were the three nations in the first RIMPAC event in 1971, and have participated in every RIMPAC since then. Japan, the United Kingdom, Chile, Peru, and South Korea, have regularly participated as well. The "war games" give fleets the opportunity to practice routine skills as well as test new naval vessels and technology.

As Chair of the Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs, I am often invited to events highlighting our military readiness. I am proud of the hard work, commitment, and level of skills of our men and women in uniform. Their rigorous preparation makes it possible for the U.S. to respond effectively to conflict situations that arise around the globe, and support our role in maintaining world stability.

Along with other guests, I was flown out to the USS Ronald Reagan to tour the aircraft carrier. We watched several drills that day, including the catapult take-offs of our jet aircraft. The experience was genuinely awe-inspiring. Hats off to the nerves of steel and precision control of our fighter pilots and the specialized, highly trained crew that support them.

We are all proud of our uniformed services. Their sense of duty and their willingness to sacrifice a "normal" lifestyle for the sake of our country and the cause of keeping the peace around the world, are admirable. I, along with many others, honor their dedication and service to our nation.