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NEWPORT FISHERMEN'S WIVES REBUT COAST GUARD MISINFORMATION

In a recent filing in federal court, a Coast Guard official in Washington, D.C. claims that the decision announced last October to close the Newport Air Station was only a "proposal" and a "now-abandoned proposal." Captain Christopher Martino also claims that it was the Coast Guard – not the City of Newport, Port of Newport and Lincoln County – that hosted two meetings in Newport seeking public input regarding the controversial decision.

"What a bunch of baloney," says Ginny Goblirsch, one of the Newport Fishermen's Wives who are the lead plaintiff in a federal lawsuit in Eugene that secured an injunction against the air station closure before Congress passed a bill in late December prohibiting that closure through the end of 2015.

In a sworn declaration filed this week in Eugene, Goblirsch presents evidence that directly contradicts the testimony from Captain Martino. This includes the Coast Guard's announcement in early October stating unequivocally that "the Coast Guard has decided to close our air facility in Newport, Oregon on November 30, 2014." And a press release demonstrating that it was the city, the port and the county that hosted the stakeholders and town hall meetings later that month, not the Coast Guard.

Ms. Goblirsch also quotes from a transcript of the testimony of Admiral Richard Gromlich at the October 20 town hall meeting. The admiral did not mince words, stating the Coast Guard decision was "final," made "at the highest levels" and "made by the Commandant of the Coast Guard."

The Coast Guard is now trying to dismiss the lawsuit in Eugene by claiming that it is now moot because of the one-year reprieve for the rescue helicopter included in the appropriations bill enacted in December. Plaintiffs in the case, who also include the City of Newport, Port of Newport, Lincoln County and the Midwater Trawlers Cooperative, are opposing the government's motion and seeking to have the case suspended through the end of the year so that it can be reactivated if the Coast Guard moves to close the facility after the one-year prohibition sunsets on January 1, 2016.

Congressman Kurt Schrader's office has examined the President's recent budget request and concluded that the Coast Guard is requesting authority in the appropriations bill for 2016 to close the air stations in Newport and Charleston, South Carolina, just as the agency did last year.

"We are very concerned that the Coast Guard will simply reissue its decision of last October late this year and attempt to close the Newport Air Station without following the public involvement and environmental review process required by law," said plaintiffs' attorney Mike Haglund. "Given the Coast Guard's budget request for the same authority that led to this case in the first place, there is every reason to keep the case alive through the first of next year when the legislative prohibition on shutting down the rescue helicopter sunsets."

Briefing on the competing motions will be completed on February 23 and a hearing before Judge Michael McShane in Eugene is expected in early March.

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