



RDP NEWSLETTER



RDP ADVOCATES FOR NAVAL BASE IMPROVEMENTS DURING WASHINGTON, DC TRIP, 2026



The Regional Defense Partnership (RDP) recently completed its annual trip to Washington, D.C., where RDP leaders and elected officials met with key decision-makers to discuss critical issues affecting Ventura County's defense activities. The delegation's efforts resulted in concrete progress on several fronts, with both congressional and military officials expressing strong support for the region's priorities.

Who Went on the Trip

- Terry Clark, Executive Director, RDP
- Supervisor Kelley Long, County of Ventura District 3
- Martha McQueen-Legohn, Port Hueneme Mayor
- Luis McArthur, Oxnard Mayor

- Laura Hernandez, Port Hueneme Mayor Pro Tem
- Celina Zacarias, CSUCI and Port of Hueneme.
- Brian Miller, Chief of Staff, Supervisor Long
- Gene Fisher, RDP Strategic Committee
- Kail Macias, RDP Strategic Committee

What They Discussed

From April 20-22, the RDP delegation presented six main priorities:

- **Power reliability improvements** at the Point Mugu Sea Range

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- **Airfield security** improvements at Point Mugu to meet evolving requirements
- **Self Defense Test Ship** replacement for weapons performance testing and evaluation
- **Facility maintenance** and contracting improvements to enhance operational efficiency
- **Facility upgrades** and modernization funding process changes to address deferred maintenance
- **Staffing and hiring flexibility** to attract and retain talent.

Who They Met With

The team visited congressional offices and military department officials, including offices of both U.S. Senators, four House Representatives, and senior Navy and Department of War leadership. These meetings provided opportunities to brief key decision-makers directly on issues that impact the bases' ability to support national defense missions.

Key Results

The trip produced meaningful progress on several fronts:

- Congressional language to increase the individual project facility modernization funding limit to \$15 million appears in both Senate and House budget proposals

- Senate included support for staffing flexibility at Navy support organizations
- Military leadership expressed support for exploring innovative approaches to power infrastructure improvements
- Officials committed to continuing dialogue on these important regional issues.

Why This Matters

The RDP's advocacy efforts demonstrate how community partnerships can effectively communicate local military installation needs to federal decision-makers.

Ventura County's naval bases and other defense activities are vital to both national security and the local economy. These activities employ thousands of workers and support critical military operations. By advocating for necessary improvements and funding, the RDP helps ensure these bases can continue to operate effectively and remain competitive for future missions and investments. The RDP's advocacy efforts demonstrate how community partnerships can effectively communicate local military installation needs to federal decision-makers, ultimately benefiting both the region and national defense capabilities.

These improvements are vital for maintaining the operational readiness of Ventura County's defense activities and supporting the thousands of workers they employ. The RDP's coordinated advocacy effort continues to provide a valuable tool for Ventura County's success.



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CALIFORNIA 2025/2026 LEGISLATION STATUS



CRAIG HODSON

Relevant California bills of interest to the Defense communities include the following bills. Note that text and details of draft legislation can substantially change so check the California Legislative

Information site for current text, analyses, and status.

Senate Bill 1 Personal income taxes: exclusion: Military Services Retirement and Surviving Spouse Benefit Payment Act.

Status: Returned to Secretary of Senate pursuant to Joint Rule 56. (Note: Partial exemption achieved via state budget process.)

Assembly Bill 53 Personal income taxes: exclusion: Military Services Retirement and Surviving Spouse Benefit Payment Act.

Status: Referred to REV & TAX and M&VA. (Note: Partial exemption achieved via state budget process.)

Assembly Bill 10 California Coastal Commission: Consistency Determinations: Vandenberg Space Force Base.

Status: Died at Desk.

Assembly Bill 14 Coastal resources: Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies Program.

Status: Approved by the Governor October 11, 2025. Chaptered by the Secretary of State - Chapter 606, Statutes of 2025.

Assembly Bill 427 Social Workers: Interstate Compact

Status: Died pursuant to Art. IV, Sec. 10(c) of the Constitution. Filed with the Chief Clerk pursuant to Joint Rule 56.

Assembly Bill 901 Veterans' Preferences: Eligible Spouses

Status: Hearing cancelled. Died pursuant to Art. IV, Sec. 10(c) of the Constitution. Filed with the Chief Clerk pursuant to Joint Rule 56.

Assembly Bill 1638 County Veterans Service Officers: Additional Resources

This bill would, upon appropriation by the Legislature, provide a stipend to counties that host an active United States military base for the purposes of maintaining a county veterans service officer, at least part time, at each active United States military base in the county, subject to base approval.

Status: Held under submission.

Senate Bill 56 Property taxation: disabled veterans' exemption: household income.

Status: Held in committee and under submission.

Senate Bill 99 Military Protective Orders

This bill (1) authorizes a court, before issuing a protective order under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA), to consider whether a military protective order (MPO) has been issued against the respondent for the same or similar conduct against a person to be protected

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CALIFORNIA 2025/2026 LEGISLATION

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by the proposed order; (2) requires a law enforcement officer to verify the existence of an MPO at the scene of a domestic violence incident; (3) requires a law enforcement officer who determines that a person involved in a domestic violence incident and who is in violation of a SB 99 protective order, and who has had an MPO issued against them, to notify the agency that entered the MPO that the person may be in violation of the MPO; and, (4) authorizes a law enforcement agency in the state that petitions for or enforces protective orders to develop and adopt memoranda of understanding with specified military entities.

Status: Ordered to engrossing and enrolling for submission to the Governor.

Senate Bill 519 Veteran Task Force

This bill would create the Veteran Task Force for the purpose of reversing the trend of veterans and individuals transitioning from the military who are leaving California to reside and work in another state. The bill would prescribe the composition of the task force, including, among others, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. The bill would require the task force to, among other things, examine existing veterans benefits in California, assistance for individuals transitioning from the military, childcare availability, affordable housing, and other services and opportunities to retain veterans and their families in California.

Status: Returned to Secretary of Senate pursuant to Joint Rule 56.

Senate Bill 694 Deceptive Practices: Service Members and Veterans

This bill would expand the definition of public social services to also include other veterans benefits. The bill would also expand the definition of an unreasonable fee to include a fee charged with respect to federal veterans benefits that exceeds the amount that could be charged for those services by an attorney or claims agent accredited by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Existing law prohibits a person from, in connection with any transaction or any sale of goods or services,

electronically accessing a Common Access Card (CAC) issued to a service member, placing or requiring the placement of such a CAC in a smart card reader, requesting or requesting entry of the personal identification number (PIN) associated with such a CAC, or requiring a service member to log in to any United States Department of Defense or, in the case of a member of the United States Coast Guard, United States Department of Homeland Security computer system. Existing law makes void a transaction or sale entered into in violation of these provisions.

This bill would extend the above-described restrictions to prohibit requiring a former or current service member to log in or share their credentials for accessing, or accessing with another person's credentials, any United States Department of Defense, United States Department of Veterans Affairs, or United States Department of Homeland Security computer system. Except as provided, the bill would prohibit a person from, in connection with any transaction or any sale of goods or services, directly or indirectly soliciting, contracting for, charging, or receiving, or attempting to solicit, contract for, charge, or receive, any fee or compensation with respect to the preparation, presentation, or prosecution of any claim for benefits under the laws administered by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. The bill would also make void a contract performed in violation of these provisions. The bill would make violations of these provisions a misdemeanor.

Status: Approved by the Governor February 10, 2026.
Chaptered by the Secretary of State. Chapter 1, Statutes of 2026.

Senate Bill 1407 Personal Income Tax Law: Exclusions: Military Retirement Pay: Survivor Benefit Pay.

Doubles the amount of uniformed services retirement pay and annuity payments from a United States Department of Defense Survivor Benefit Plan that a qualifying military retiree or surviving spouse are allowed to exclude from their gross income. Specifically, this bill:

Increases, from \$20,000 to \$40,000, the amount of

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uniformed services retirement pay and annuity payments from a United States Department of Defense Survivor Benefit Plan that a qualified taxpayer may exclude from their gross income for taxable years beginning on or after January 1, 2026, and before January 1, 2037. Adjusted gross income limitation is either \$125,000 (single) or \$250,000 (joint or surviving spouse).

Requires the Franchise Tax Board (FTB) to recalculate,

on an annual basis, the adjusted gross income eligibility limitation by applying an inflation adjustment factor based on the percentage change in the California Consumer Price Index as provided by the Department of Industrial Relations.

Status: Active Bill - Held in committee and under submission (dead of rate year)



DEFENSE SPENDING REPORTS: FEDERAL, STATE & LOCAL

I. Federal Level Reporting by OLDCC

The Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation published an abridged report which documents the results of a state-by-state analysis of defense personnel, contractual, and grant spending during Fiscal Year FY2024 in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. State and local officials use this information to assess a region's dependence on defense spending and to target assistance to support more resilient communities and companies.

This report contains defense spending and personnel data at the state and national level only. At the time of publication, FY 2024 personnel data were incomplete at the county level.

The report Defense Spending by State Fiscal Year 2024 is available on the website:

<https://oldcc.gov/defense-spending-state-fiscal-year-2024>

FY 2024 Overview: The defense budget authority increased from \$874.3 billion in FY 2023 to \$909.6 billion in FY 2024. Defense contract obligations, grant obligations, and payroll spending in all 50 states and the District of Columbia totaled \$606.7 billion, approximately \$1,784 per U.S. resident and 2.1 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

California Spending: California ranked first for total spending (\$63.2 billion) second for contract spending (\$42.9 billion), first for grant spending (\$1.039 billion), and second for personnel spending (\$19.3 billion). Defense spending amounted to 1.5% of California state GDP.

Largest contractor in California is Northrup Grumman (\$4.87 billion) followed by Centene (\$3.55 billion). Total

contract spending in Ventura County is reported at \$1.6 billion.

II. California Reporting by California State Library

The California State Library California Research Bureau recently published the detailed report 2025 California Statewide National Security Economic Impacts Study (October 2025) which is available at:

https://www.library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/crb-reports/2025_California_Statewide_MEIS.pdf

The report is broader than the OLDCC reports since data for national defense activities (defense, Homeland Security and Veteran's Administration are combined but Department of Energy is excluded.) Therefore, the numbers are not directly comparable but still give a valid assessment of economic impact.

The six key findings are:

(1) National security activity generates 818,000 full time equivalent jobs for residents of California.

This includes 434,000 full-time equivalent jobs (FTEs) directly employed by the national security agencies and their contractors. The defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs combined to employ approximately 339,000 Californians, including 162,000 active-duty and 52,000 reserve service members, as well as 124,000 civilian employees.

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In addition, 61,000 FTEs are employed indirectly through the supply chain of direct activities and 323,000 FTEs are employed as a result of economic activity induced by the additional money in the economy.

(Direct employment is 60,000 civilians, 161,000 active duty and 53,000 reserve/National Guard; Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security add 62,000).

(2) National security activity produces \$207.0 billion in economic impact.

The \$207.0 billion represents approximately 5.0% of the state's economy. This includes:

- \$121.4 billion of direct economic activity by the agencies and their contractors;
- \$16.3 billion of indirect economic activity created through the supply chain of direct activities; and
- \$69.4 billion of induced economic activity as a result of additional money in the economy.

(3) The economic impacts of national security activity were felt across industries.

The state's various manufacturing sectors saw over \$21.5 billion in total economic output and over 41,400 FTE jobs supported by national security activity. The top manufacturing sectors include aerospace (\$7.5 billion in output and 14,800 FTEs) and electronics (\$3.9 billion and 5,900 FTEs). Other industrial sectors impacted by national security activity include professional services, with \$19.1 billion in output and 81,000 FTEs (especially scientific research and development: \$5.7 billion and 15,100 FTEs); real estate (\$12.8 billion and 17,900 FTEs); healthcare (\$9.2 billion and 54,400 FTEs); and insurance (\$8.3 billion and 23,700 FTEs).

(4) California has the most security-related jobs of any state and ranks third in security-related contract spending.

California has 162,000 active-duty service members, more than any other state, ahead of Virginia (122,000), Texas (111,000), and North Carolina (96,000), the next highest states.

California's 124,000 civilian employees top Virginia (123,000) and Texas (114,000), as well. California had the third largest share of national security-related contracts

in 2024 with \$35.6 billion across the three departments, trailing Virginia (\$49.2 billion) and Texas (\$43.5 billion).

(5) National security activity generates \$31.7 billion in tax revenue for federal, state and local governments.

Federal tax revenue from national security activity in California totals \$21.7 billion. State tax revenue totals \$9.9 billion, including \$2.3 billion in state income tax revenue, \$2.5 billion in sales tax, and \$2.3 billion in property tax, as well as other smaller taxes and fees.

(6) Including a portion of the Department of Energy's activities would increase total economic activity in California by approximately \$6.1 billion.

The estimated portion of Department of Energy activity related to national security leads to approximately \$6.1 billion in total output and 21,500 FTEs, which are mostly concentrated in scientific research and development.

III. Ventura County Reporting by California State Library

The California State Library California Research Bureau published the report 2025

The California State Library California Research Bureau published the report 2025 Counties Supplement (December 2025) to the 2025 California Statewide National Security Economic Impacts Study (October 2025) which is available at:

https://www.library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/crb-reports/2025_MEIS_Counties_Supplement.pdf

This report aggregates Ventura County economic impact into the Central Coast Region. Direct spending in the Central Coast region is listed as \$2.3 billion or \$99.9 million per 100,000 residents. Direct personnel (military plus civilian) is 31,000.

Raw 2024 data for Ventura County reported in 2025 are:

The total amount of Veterans Affairs direct benefits payments in the county:

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\$344,122,470. This is compensation and pensions.

The total amount of direct spending in the county:
\$1,158,763,947.

The total amount of direct economic output received in the county as a result of the total national security-related spending and employment: \$3,737,820,785.

The total amount of economic output received in the county as a result of the total national security-related spending and employment: \$5,580,824,389. This is a summation of the direct, indirect, and induced output. The total number of active duty and reserve military personnel in the county/district: 5,955.

The total number of national security-related civilian personnel in the county. This includes civilian employees in the Departments of the Army, Air Force, defense, Navy, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs: 5,549.

The total amount of direct full-time equivalent jobs supported in the county as a result of the total national security-related spending and employment: 12,804.

The total amount of full-time equivalent jobs supported in the county as a result of the total national security-related spending and employment: 22,740.

This is a summation of the direct, indirect, and induced

FTE numbers.

IV. Summary

Key points: California Spending: California ranked first for total spending (\$63.2 billion).

- National security activity generates 818,000 full time equivalent jobs for residents of California. National security activity produces \$207.0 billion is economic impact. The \$207.0 billion represents approximately 5.0% of the state's economy.
- The defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs combined to employ approximately 339,000 Californians, including 162,000 active-duty and 52,000 reserve service members, as well as 124,000 civilian employees.
- The total amount of economic output received in Ventura County as a result of the total national security-related spending and employment: \$5,580,824,389.
- The total amount of full-time equivalent jobs supported in Ventura County as a result of the total national security related spending and employment: 22,740.

This is a summation of the direct, indirect, and induced FTE numbers.



NAVAL AIR WARFARE CENTER WEAPONS DIVISION

V1 EARNs SEVENTH CNO AVIATION SAFETY AWARD



PHOTO BY KATIE ARCHIBALD | A VX-31 F/A-18E SUPER HORNET IN FLIGHT. THE DUST DEVILS WON THE FISCAL 2025 CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS AVIATION SAFETY AWARD, THEIR SEVENTH SINCE 2003 AND SECOND IN THREE YEARS. (U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY KATIE ARCHIBALD)

BY TIM GANTNER

The Dust Devils of Air Test and Evaluation Squadron (VX) 31 won the Chief of Naval Operations Aviation Safety Award for fiscal 2025, their seventh since 2003 and their second in three years.

The award, known as the CNO Safety “S,” is given annually to U.S. Navy and Marine Corps aviation units operating under Navy chains of command, with one squadron selected per aircraft type per coast.

The honor recognizes squadrons for “exceptional professionalism, commitment to excellence, solid leadership and teamwork, the high-velocity outcomes, and in-depth risk management culture which resulted in safe and effective operations.”

In January, a new hangar door rolled open at China Lake and 425 people walked through. They had just left their temporary spaces and consolidated under one roof in Hangar 6, a new facility built to replace the one the 2019 Ridgecrest

earthquake destroyed. In March, U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Timothy Burchett took command. By September, the squadron had retired the AV-8B Harrier after roughly 40 years of testing. And in October, it stood up a new Unmanned Systems Department.

Three transitions in nine months. The safety program held.

“The squadron had an intense focus on building new habit patterns that leveraged historical best practices and adapted them to our new surroundings,” Burchett said. “This diligent focus on basics and procedural compliance at all levels of the squadron led to a large reduction in ground mishaps and reflected a culture wherein safety was viewed not as a burden but as a critical enabler for mission success.”

Mishaps went down. Hard.

Compared to fiscal 2024, VX-31 recorded a 19% reduction in overall aviation mishaps and a 78% decrease in aviation

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ground operation mishaps. And that from a squadron flying 30 aircraft across seven Type/Model/Series, where 40% of flights are tests and every airframe carries experimental hardware or software not yet fielded.

James Coppersmith has been at VX-31, on and off, since 2002. He is now the squadron's technical director.

"Our range of missions, uniquely configured aircraft, and workforce composition has no parallel in Fleet squadrons," Coppersmith said. "Our safety culture bridges the gap between high-stakes developmental test flights and the unforgiving environments of high-elevation and Mojave Desert search and rescue missions."

At China Lake, in the Indian Wells Valley between the Sierra Nevada and Death Valley, VX-31 also runs a search and rescue department. Its MH-60S crews rappel into canyons, hoist stranded hikers off mountain ledges, and land in thin air that pushes the helicopter to its operating limits.

Then there was U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Joseph Tom.

In August, Maj. Tom was preparing for an Automatic Terrain Awareness Warning System test flight when he caught a configuration mismatch during pre-flight. The aircraft was outside asymmetry limits for takeoff. Left unnoticed, it could have caused a mishap after rotation. So Tom flagged it, maintenance corrected it, and the test flew successfully. He later earned a Safety Pro award.

"It's a culture where every single person is empowered to use the No Vote and stop an evolution for safety," said Kristine Sweigart, VX-31 safety officer.

The commodore saw it too.

"VX-31 earning the Safety 'S' is a direct reflection of a command that executes some of Naval Aviation's most demanding test missions with discipline, professionalism, and sound risk management," said U.S. Navy Capt. David Halpern, Naval Test Wing Pacific commodore. "It reflects strong leadership, engaged deckplate ownership, and a team that understands safety is fundamental to readiness."



NAWCWD DATA SYSTEM SPEEDS TRUSTED TEST EQUIPMENT TO THE FLEET

BY MICHAEL SMITH

CHINA LAKE, CALIFORNIA

A Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division team rebuilt how the Navy tracks and delivers fleet test equipment, cutting errors and getting reliable gear to ships faster.

The work earned the team Naval Sea Systems Command's top metrology and calibration honor, the V.B. (Kisan) Pandit Innovation Team Award, May 21 at the Washington Navy Yard.

The General Purpose

Electrical/Electronic Test Equipment team manages that equipment for ships, shore sites and shipyards across the fleet.



CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 5 VICTOR JENSEN JR., A RIDGECREST, CALIFORNIA, NATIVE, WEARS HIS NEW RANK FOLLOWING HIS PROMOTION CEREMONY. JENSEN WAS PROMOTED BY REAR ADM. KEITH HASH, COMMANDER, NAVAL AIR WARFARE CENTER WEAPONS DIVISION.

Sailors use meters, scopes and sensors to verify that combat and support systems work. A system that can't be checked can't be trusted at sea. When the gear that checks it is wrong or late, readiness slips.

For years, NAWCWD ran that mission on aging tools. Data lived in spreadsheets and scattered files. It moved on quarterly

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NAVAL AIR WARFARE CENTER WEAPONS DIVISION

disks and often reached customers stale or incomplete.

Cory McCullough, GPETE branch head, led the team to replace the patchwork with one modern data system, called REALIS. It gave engineers, analysts and program managers a single trusted source for test equipment data and a faster way to move that equipment to the fleet.

Program managers and fleet customers now work from current records instead of fragmented files.

The system replaced a manual process that generated about 30 errors a week. It now prevents more than 1,500 data-entry errors a year. Automated checks replaced manual reviews, cutting some timelines from weeks to minutes.

Cleaner data gives the Navy a sharper picture of what each platform needs and where each asset sits. GPETE moved from fixing errors after the fact to catching them before equipment ships.

The team isn't done.

"The next step is getting every Sailor the right data the

second it changes, not months later. That's what keeps the fleet ready to fight," McCullough said.

The award honors Vishnu B. (Kisan) Pandit, a NAVSEA metrology and calibration program manager. He was one of 12 people killed in the Sept. 16, 2013, shooting at the Washington Navy Yard.

NAVSEA created the award in 2017 and presents it each May to mark World Metrology Day.

The award recognized a cross-functional team of engineers, analysts, computer scientists, technicians and financial specialists. The awardees are Cory McCullough, Thomas Morey, Beatriz Sorensen, Nicole Baird, Korey Englert, Timothy Lyons, Dulce Bimbela, Nikkole Richardson, Julio Hernandez, Ulysses Velazquez, Marco Guzman, Patrick Snow, Steven Brooks and Debra Arlow.

For the fleet, the work means fewer errors and faster delivery. For the warfighter, it means the equipment that verifies a system shows up right, complete and on time.



NAVAL AIR WARFARE CENTER WEAPONS DIVISION

NAWCWD ENGINEERS TURNED A THREAT SIMULATOR INTO AN OFFENSIVE ELECTRONIC ATTACK WEAPON

BY MICHAEL SMITH

Keith Yuen, a supervisory engineer at Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division spent years building a jammer designed to defeat America's own radars. The harder his team made it for friendly pilots to see through the jamming, the better they were doing their job.

The Air Force wanted Georgia Tech's Angry Kitten technology but needed a team to integrate and field it. They chose NAWCWD.

Then the question changed: what if the same system could jam the enemy?

The system is Angry Kitten, an electronic warfare pod that NAWCWD engineers integrated and matured over a decade. Built to simulate hostile jamming during training, it is now headed to contested airspace as an offensive weapon, giving pilots a proven, government-owned jammer to suppress enemy air defenses.

That transformation spans three military services and a partnership between NAWCWD and Georgia Tech Research Institute that began with one requirement: the Air Force needed better threat pods.

In 2013, aggressor squadrons at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, needed advanced jamming pods to create realistic electronic warfare environments during training. Georgia Tech Research Institute had developed Angry Kitten's core technology. The Air Force needed a team to package it into a flyable, maintainable pod system.

They chose NAWCWD's Airborne Threat Simulation Organization. The organization had spent decades building and fielding threat simulation jammers for Navy and Air Force training ranges, working directly with intelligence agencies to replicate the electronic warfare environments U.S. pilots would face in combat.

Its engineers brought deep knowledge of the threat signals being replicated and the friendly radars being tested.



PHOTO BY KIMBERLY BROWN | AN ANGRY KITTEN ELECTRONIC WARFARE POD SITS ON A MAINTENANCE STAND AT NAVAL AIR WARFARE CENTER WEAPONS DIVISION. NAWCWD ENGINEERS INTEGRATED AND MATURED THE POD SYSTEM THROUGH A PARTNERSHIP WITH GEORGIA TECH RESEARCH INSTITUTE, GIVING WARFIGHTERS A GOVERNMENT-OWNED JAMMER CAPABLE OF SUPPRESSING ENEMY AIR DEFENSES.

"They knew that's our expertise and we're really good at integration," Yuen said.

First flights came in 2017. The early years tested the engineering team as much as the pods.

Antenna covers cracked during high-speed flights at Nellis, creating foreign object debris risk to aircraft engines. The Air Force grounded every pod. The program's credibility was on the line. NAWCWD engineers worked with Georgia Tech to redesign the radome and returned the fleet to flight status within months.

The fix demonstrated more than engineering discipline. It proved the strength of a partnership where Georgia Tech develops and prototypes the electronic warfare technology

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and NAWCWD integrates it onto aircraft, certifies it for flight and sustains it in the field.

At the core of that technology is Angry Kitten's Technique Description Language architecture. Georgia Tech designed TDL as a hybrid that pairs dedicated hardware modules for speed and bandwidth with software for complex decision-making.

The practical result: government programmers can reprogram the jammer to counter new threats without sending it back to the contractor for expensive, time-consuming code changes. When an adversary adapts its radar tactics, NAWCWD's team can update the jammer's response in days instead of waiting months for a contract modification.

"This enabled the government operators of the pods to generate a huge variety of high-performance electronic attack techniques at vastly reduced costs and development times, as compared to other systems," said Roger Dickerson, principal research engineer at Georgia Tech Research Institute.

That reprogramming speed attracted units beyond the training world.

The Air National Guard Air Force Reserve Command Test Center in Tucson secured an agreement to use Angry Kitten pods. Operators discovered that the red adversary simulator could fill a gap left by delays to the Air Force's next-generation jammer program.

By 2024, what started as a borrowed training asset had

become an operational test bed.

They validated the pods' offensive potential through exercises and range testing. In a March 2025 statement, Christopher Culver, electronic warfare technical lead at the test center, said operators were reprogramming techniques and pushing real-time updates to the pod. The approach enabled rapid optimization of jamming against threat systems.

AATC secured authorization to bring Angry Kitten to theater.

"We developed this system as a training tool to test our radars, and now we're bringing that same capability to warfighters as an offensive electronic attack jammer to protect their aircraft in real situations," Yuen said.

The dual role works because electronic warfare allows it. A threat simulator and an offensive jammer use the same physics, the same signal processing, the same hardware. What changes is the target.

NAWCWD's threat expertise made the system realistic enough to train against. That same realism made it effective enough to fight with.

"We take the lessons learned from jamming our own radars and bring that capability to our operators in harm's way," Yuen said.



NAVAL SURFACE WARFARE CENTER PHD

WARFARE CENTER DEVELOPS NEW TOOL TO HELP SAILORS KEEP VERTICAL LAUNCHING SYSTEM LATCH RODS MOVING

BY MICHAEL SMITH

Launcher support personnel at Naval Surface Warfare Center, Port Hueneme Division (NSWC PHD) in California have developed and tested a new tool to aid Navy sailors in maintaining MK 41 Vertical Launching System (VLS) cell

The effort came in response to ship's force feedback at the VLS Fleet Symposium that NSWC PHD hosted in 2024. Sailors who attended that event highlighted the difficulty of dealing with stuck VLS latch rods, and the new tool addresses



COURTESY PHOTO | ERIC CSORBA, A VERTICAL LAUNCHING SYSTEM (VLS) CANISTER AND LAUNCHER SUPPORT EQUIPMENT ENGINEERING TECHNICIAN AT NAVAL SURFACE WARFARE CENTER, PORT HUENEME DIVISION IN CALIFORNIA, HOLDS A PROTOTYPE TOOL THAT HE DESIGNED IN HIS HOME SHOP, SEEN HERE DEC. 14. THE TOOL AIMS TO HELP NAVY SAILORS MAINTAIN MK 41 VLS LATCH RODS, WHICH SECURE THE HATCHES THAT COVER THE LAUNCHER'S MISSILE CELLS.

hatches without damaging them in the process.

Eric Csorba, a VLS canister and launcher support equipment engineering technician at NSWC PHD, designed the tool to help sailors keep VLS latch rods moving freely. The latch rods secure the hatches that cover the launcher's missile cells.

"It's about making sure VLS is prepared and ready at any time," Csorba said.

that issue, according to Richard Langley, launching system In-Service Engineering Agent program manager at NSWC PHD.

"It will save effort and time for the sailors," Langley said.

Csorba said the tool also offers the potential to save the Navy money in cell hatch repairs while avoiding downtime, boosting readiness for the missile launcher that provides critical firepower for Navy destroyers and cruisers.

NAVAL SURFACE WARFARE CENTER PHD

Exercise regimen

As specified in a maintenance requirement card, sailors have to exercise VLS latch rods — in other words, move them back and forth — every other month to ensure they don't seize up due to corrosion or cold weather. They also conduct the procedure two weeks before onloading missiles.

Sailors have been employing other tools like screwdrivers, pry bars and locking pliers to exercise the latch rods, but those can gradually damage the knife edge — a metal lip that surrounds the cell opening. Damaged knife edges, in turn, can cut the seal inside the cell hatch when it opens and closes, compromising its protection against saltwater and sea air intruding into the below-deck launcher modules.

Replacing a knife edge costs about \$12,000, according to Csorba, and typically would need to be done during a maintenance availability at a Regional Maintenance Center (RMC).

Based on quotes from machine shops, the latch rod tool that Csorba designed could cost as little as \$200 per unit to manufacture. He said the goal is to get two of them aboard each ship equipped with VLS, of which there are now about 80 in the U.S. Navy fleet.

"It needs to be part of their regular equipment," Csorba said, referring to a shipboard maintenance kit with specialized tools for sailors working on VLS.

Finding the right fit

Command VLS personnel developed a list of criteria for the design of the proposed latch rod tool.

It would have to be lightweight and portable, employing aluminum in the construction, while also durable enough to withstand the rigors of shipboard use. And it would need a protective coating to resist corrosion in marine environments.

Ease of use was a critical facet for the tool, avoiding the need for specialized skills and minimizing user error and physical strain.

Manufacturing simplicity was another key factor. The design had to incorporate basic measurements and readily available components to make sure it can be manufactured and

procured for many years to come.

The tool also had to fit the VLS hatch latches and work both ways — left or right — because there are latches on opposite sides of the hatches.

And, of course, someone would need to design the tool to meet those specifications. Csorba volunteered.

"Eric took the initiative to do this himself," Langley said. "He's very enthusiastic about helping the fleet."

In his element

Csorba worked on the project in his home shop on evenings and weekends. The former welder has furnished his 2,000-square-foot facility with a full range of fabrication equipment, which he has used to build race cars as well as custom tools for Navy destroyers.

For the latch rod tool, he cut sections of metal, milled them, drilled them and used a lathe to size them.

Csorba borrowed left and right latches from the command's VLS module production facility, which enabled him to find the right fit. His own mental vision also guided the design process, he said.

"I see a finished product in my mind and just work my way to it, evolving as I go," Csorba said.

Torrence Pineau-Brown, VLS automated test equipment manager at NSWC PHD, pitched in with his own Computer Numerical Control machine, or CNC, to mill sections of the prototype.

Csorba and Pineau-Brown have collaborated on other VLS-related items that the command now uses in various locations, such as launch sequencer test stands, missile simulator carts, redesigned canister support rollers, canister adapter rotation equipment and assembly jigs.

Csorba demonstrated an early version of his latch rod tool design for Langley on a VLS deck and hatch — the top part of the module — at NSWC PHD. Then Csorba incorporated Langley's input into the next version of the prototype.

The third iteration became the final prototype. It features a pivoting base section that engages the latch rods inside a VLS

NAVAL SURFACE WARFARE CENTER PHD

cell, and a lever that sailors hold from above the cell to move the rod back and forth.

Csorba and his colleagues have tested the prototype on VLS hatches in NSWC PHD facilities. Those tests confirmed that the tool works in VLS cells containing any type of missile canister, and it actuates the latch rod without damaging the cell mouth or compromising the hatch seal, according to the team's report on the project.

Now the RMCs are testing and evaluating the tool. Csorba said several of them have already provided positive feedback.

Funding from PEO IWS 3L, which oversees surface ship launchers, will pay for producing the latch rod tools for the fleet.

Fleet connection

As to why there wasn't already a tool for exercising latch rods in VLS, Langley's own experience in the fleet sheds some light.

As a sailor prior to his civilian career, Langley served as a VLS technician aboard destroyers. He said he recalls struggling to move stuck latch rods at times and grabbing whatever tool



PHOTO PROVIDED BY ERIC CSORBA. AN EARLIER VERSION OF A PROTOTYPE TOOL THAT NAVAL SURFACE WARFARE CENTER, PORT HUENEME DIVISION (NSWC PHD) ENGINEERING TECHNICIAN ERIC CSORBA DESIGNED ENGAGES A LATCH ROD INSIDE A MK 41 VERTICAL LAUNCHING SYSTEM (VLS) CELL AT NSWC PHD'S LAUNCHER LAB IN PORT HUENEME, CALIFORNIA, ON JUNE 4. TESTING CONFIRMED THAT THE TOOL ACTUATES THE LATCH ROD WITHOUT DAMAGING THE CELL MOUTH OR COMPROMISING THE HATCH SEAL.

"They say the latch tool works great," he said.

Once the design is finalized, command engineers will use Csorba's sketches and prototype to reverse engineer the tool and create a drawing package for it.

Langley said he hopes to finalize the design and approve the drawing package by the end of February and start production of the latch rod tool in March. He added that NSWC PHD and Program Executive Office Integrated Warfare Systems (PEO IWS) 3L will determine the best steps forward for procuring the tool after receiving all of the quotes from prospective manufacturers.

was handy to pry them loose.

The VLS Fleet Symposium provides a venue for sailors to bring up challenges like this directly with engineers and technicians who can help them.

"That's exactly the reason why we do it," Langley said of hosting the annual event.

The 2026 VLS Fleet Symposium is slated for May 18-22 in Moorestown, New Jersey.



NAVAL SURFACE WARFARE CENTER PHD

NAVY'S DIRECTED ENERGY SYSTEMS INTEGRATION LAB TO TRAIN SAILORS ON LASER WEAPONS



PHOTO BY THOMAS MCMAHON | DIRECTED ENERGY TEAM MEMBERS WITH NAVAL SURFACE WARFARE CENTER, PORT HUENEME DIVISION GATHER AROUND THE OPTICAL DAZZLING INTERDICTOR, NAVY (ODIN) BEHIND THE DIRECTED ENERGY SYSTEMS INTEGRATION LABORATORY (DESIL) ONBOARD NAVAL BASE VENTURA COUNTY POINT MUGU IN CALIFORNIA ON JAN. 30, 2025. DESIL NOW OFFERS COURSES ON OPERATING AND MAINTAINING ODIN, GIVING SAILORS AND OTHER STUDENTS HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE WITH THE DIRECTED ENERGY SYSTEM IN A TRAINING ENVIRONMENT. (U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY ERIC PARSONS)

STORY BY THOMAS MCMAHON

Sailors can now get certified in operating and maintaining the fleet's most prevalent directed energy system through a new training program at Naval Surface Warfare Center, Port Hueneme Division (NSWC PHD)'s Directed Energy Systems Integration Laboratory (DESIL), with the first course completed in late March.

The Navy recently designated DESIL as the official schoolhouse for the Optical Dazzling Interdictor, Navy (ODIN), seven of which sit on Navy ships. The courses will build the fleet's knowledge base on that system specifically and directed energy more broadly, while also enabling sailors to earn a new Laser Weapon System Operator Navy Enlisted Classification (NEC) that NSWC PHD spearheaded. While weapon system instruction for fleet personnel normally

falls under Surface Combat Systems Training Command (SCSTC), DESIL's in-house directed energy subject matter experts (SMEs), equipment and infrastructure make it uniquely equipped to serve as the ODIN schoolhouse, according to Davidson Sim, directed energy sustainment systems engineer.

"Our facility has the SMEs — and subsequently the trainers — and a resident ODIN system," Sim said. "And we have access to a test range, allowing us to actually emit and use the laser in a training environment."

DESIL, perched on the oceanfront at Naval Base Ventura County Point Mugu in California, is the Navy's only facility for testing directed energy in a maritime environment —

continued on next page

NAVAL SURFACE WARFARE CENTER PHD

offering line-of-sight to the Point Mugu Sea Range and access to sea, air and land targets.

Although ODIN is not a Navy program of record at this time, NSWC PHD pitched SCSTC on the need for an official training program because of how the fleet has been using the directed energy system and how it has matured since it went into service in 2020.

ODIN's dazzling laser is designed to blind the sensors of unmanned aerial systems. The system also offers powerful intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance features, such as cameras and a telescope, allowing operators to see farther and capture footage of adversaries in high detail and resolution.

That technology is only effective in the hands of sailors trained to operate and maintain it, which is where the schoolhouse comes in, according to Lawrence Averion, directed energy branch manager.

"It's about making sure the warfighters are ready to use the systems, and giving them the confidence that they can actually meet the mission," Averion said.

The schoolhouse will also provide a new professional development opportunity for sailors working with directed energy systems.

Directed energy education

An NEC is a specialization within a sailor's rating. The DESIL team worked with the Navy Manpower Analysis Center, known as NAVMAC, to establish the new Laser Weapon System Operator NEC, which also required endorsements from the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations and Program Executive Office Integrated Warfare Systems. It became official Feb. 4.

The NEC is akin to a major in an academic degree, according to Illiana Rausch, an administrative technical specialist in NSWC PHD's directed energy branch who worked on developing the new Laser Weapon System Operator NEC.

"It's like your specific field of study in college — you're specialized in this area," Rausch said.

Sailors who take the ODIN courses and earn the laser NEC will be in the fire controlman rating. Sim said the Navy has been leveraging fire controlmen with NECs for conventional armaments — for example, the close-in weapon system — to

operate and maintain ODIN.

"This sparked the need for a new NEC, because directed energy weapon systems are unique from guns and traditional ordnance," Sim said.

To earn the new Laser Weapon System Operator NEC, NAVMAC requires sailors to complete two ODIN courses at DESIL.

Comprehensive curriculum

The two courses, each lasting five days, will combine classroom instruction with hands-on learning with the ODIN unit at DESIL.

One course focuses on operating ODIN — using a console to master key functions like tracking and locking on targets, firing the dazzling laser and managing critical alerts.

Tracking targets is one of the more challenging aspects of learning to use a directed energy system like ODIN, according to Averion. When an object is far away, it appears as a mere pixel on the operator's screen and can be hard to follow. The opportunity to practice locking on real-life targets with the ODIN unit and console at DESIL will help "immensely" with that learning curve, Averion said.

The other schoolhouse course covers maintaining ODIN — how to conduct effective preventive and corrective maintenance for ODIN and its subsystems. Sailors will learn to utilize the ODIN manual and Maintenance Requirement Cards, and they'll practice those required upkeep procedures on the ODIN equipment at DESIL.

Sim will initially teach the courses while training others at NSWC PHD to take on the role. Specifically, the goal is to have command military personnel undergo training on classroom instruction techniques and tap their experience with ODIN so they can instruct sailors from the fleet on the system.

"So it becomes military training military, which we think is most ideal," Sim said.

Leveraging the military personnel as trainers will also be more cost-effective than paying civilian employees to do it, Sim explained, which will be especially critical over the next two years before an external funding source kicks in.

Ships and shore-based commands can find the ODIN

NAVAL SURFACE WARFARE CENTER PHD

schoolhouse offerings in the Catalog of Navy Training Courses.

The directed energy team has started promoting the ODIN courses to ships equipped with that system. They also plan to bring in sailors from USS Preble (DDG 88), which is outfitted with a different directed energy weapon — the High Energy Laser with Integrated Optical-dazzler and Surveillance system, known as HELIOS.

“Our training is tailorable,” Sim said. “It’s ODIN training, but really it’s directed energy training.”

ODIN, HELIOS and the Solid State Laser Technology Maturation system — which is also at DESIL — all employ the same user interface, known as the Laser Weapon System Console. That and other similarities among the systems, such as their general maintenance philosophy, allow the schoolhouse to broaden the scope of the instruction beyond ODIN, Averion said.

Accordingly, the USS Preble personnel will learn fundamentals of directed energy systems while at DESIL, and then an SME will cover details specific to HELIOS when they return to their ship, Sim explained.

Commands that support the fleet can also make use of the training. The first course brought in personnel from the Navy’s Board of Inspection and Survey, known as INSURV, to increase their knowledge of ODIN for when they inspect ships with the system.

Regional maintenance centers (RMCs) are also among the target audience for the courses. Sim said this will help expand the support network for ODIN by training RMC personnel to respond first to ships’ casualty reports with the system. That, in turn, could reduce the need for NSWC PHD ISEAs to travel for onboard technical assistance, according to Sim.

ODIN and beyond

There are eight ODIN units in all. The system at DESIL came from USS Kidd (DDG 100) when it was entering a two-year

maintenance availability in Everett, Washington.

Along with the training program, the directed energy team uses its resident ODIN unit for testing, and it maintains and sustains the system, which the type commander pays for and appreciates, Sim said.

“DESIL has become a trusted agent to the fleet,” he said.

The current ODIN unit at DESIL is slated to go back aboard USS Kidd in about a year, at the end of the ship’s maintenance availability. After that, the team expects to get systems from other destroyers as they enter the shipyard for extended periods.

“Basically for the next decade or so, we should have an ODIN unit from a ship that’s going into an upgrade,” Sim said.

Meanwhile, as the Department of War develops new generations of directed energy weapons, the ODIN course will serve as a stepping stone for supporting future systems, according to Sim.

Establishing the schoolhouse also reflects how far the field of directed energy has progressed.

“When NSWC PHD got started in directed energy, it was basically science projects,” Sim said. “Now these ODIN systems have proven themselves important in a tactical environment. ... We’ve overcome the hurdles of embracing directed energy, and we can take that foundation and apply it to the next-gen systems.”

The years of experience that the NSWC PHD team has accumulated fielding the existing systems in the fleet, along with the recent efforts to establish the schoolhouse, have positioned DESIL to become the “center of excellence” for future directed energy training across the Department of War, according to Averion.

“We’re essentially postured and ready to take those new systems and train all the military to use them,” he said.



U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY DANA RENE WHITE/RELEASED. NAVAL SURFACE WARFARE CENTER, PORT HUENEME DIVISION'S DIRECTED ENERGY SYSTEMS INTEGRATION LABORATORY (DESIL) LOOMS OVER THE EDGE OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN ONBOARD NAVAL BASE VENTURA COUNTY POINT MUGU IN CALIFORNIA. THE NAVY RECENTLY DESIGNATED DESIL AS THE OFFICIAL SCHOOLHOUSE FOR THE OPTICAL DAZZLING INTERDICTION, NAVY, KNOWN AS ODIN, WHICH WILL BUILD THE FLEET'S KNOWLEDGE BASE ON THAT SYSTEM SPECIFICALLY AND DIRECTED ENERGY MORE BROADLY.



NAVAL SURFACE WARFARE CENTER PHD

WARFARE CENTER CYBER TEST TEAM ACHIEVES CERTIFICATION

STORY BY TERI CARNICELLI

Naval Surface Warfare Center, Port Hueneme Division (NSWC PHD) last year became the first warfare center on the West Coast to be certified as a Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) cybersecurity penetration test team, thanks in part to Naval Innovative Science and Engineering (NISE) funds.

NSWC PHD's cybersecurity engineering branch had already begun the process of NAVSEA Penetration Test or "Pentest" (NPT) certification prior to the influx of NISE funds, explained Steven Coleman, the command's NAVSEA Pentest lead.

"NISE provided funding for our team members to take additional training that led to our success in the various cyber certification events," said Coleman, who also served as principal investigator for the cyber purple team NISE project for fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

The project, funded under the NISE workforce development category, received a total of \$247,000 over the two fiscal years.

"The core idea was to develop our internal cybersecurity talent in a new way," said NSWC PHD NISE Program Manager Shala Garcia. "The project proposal specified using the funds for advanced personnel training, developing new cyber testing processes, and seeding a new Incident Response (IR) team to provide data analysis and forensics capabilities. This investment directly contributed to the team's success in achieving the NAVSEA Pentest certification."

Cyber penetration tests involve simulating a cyberattack against a ship's or network's computer system to identify vulnerabilities. Cybersecurity specialists at the command have conducted such tests for years, said Eric Monette in an earlier story about the NAVSEA certification. Monette is NSWC PHD's cybersecurity team lead and works closely with the penetration test team.

Certification authorizes NSWC PHD to perform tests in laboratory environments or on simulated systems beyond the portfolio the command's team now supports.



WARFARE CENTER CYBER TEST TEAM ACHIEVES CERTIFICATION PHOTO BY JHON PARSONS | FROM LEFT: MARCUS CERVANTES, COMPUTER ENGINEER; ANETTE VLADESCU, CYBERSECURITY ENGINEER; IAN WILSON, COMPUTER SCIENTIST; STEVEN COLEMAN, CYBERSECURITY PENETRATION TEST TEAM LEAD; AND ALEX HINDS, COMPUTER ENGINEER, WERE PART OF A TEAM FROM NAVAL SURFACE WARFARE CENTER, PORT HUENEME DIVISION THAT TRAVELED TO THE U.S. NAVY'S SURFACE COMBAT SYSTEMS CENTER ON WALLOPS ISLAND, VIRGINIA, IN SEPTEMBER, AND WHILE THERE PASSED NAVAL SEA SYSTEMS COMMAND (NAVSEA)'S CYBERSECURITY SKILLS ASSESSMENT TO BECOME THE FIRST WARFARE CENTER ON THE WEST COAST TO BE CERTIFIED AS A NAVSEA CYBERSECURITY PENETRATION TEST TEAM.

The new designation applies to the warfare center itself, not just the individuals who participated in the assessment, Coleman said. That means the command's NPT can now train, test and add new team members and build out the command's strategic cybersecurity vision.

The team also can now conduct penetration tests for other systems and on behalf of NAVSEA, augmenting NAVSEA's ability to conduct the tests, he added.

The establishment of the IR team helps to provide data analysis capability to the NPT, in addition to providing the command with IR and forensics capabilities, Coleman said.

While those specific funds have been fully executed, the NISE program is designed to foster capabilities that can be sustained over time, Garcia said, adding that the success of the initial project has led to follow-on efforts.

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“For example, a new project was selected for fiscal 2026 to continue building on this expertise,” Garcia said. “This demonstrates the NISE program’s value in not just starting innovative projects, but in growing them to meet evolving command needs.”

Garcia added that the command’s NPT is a “powerful success story that showcases how NISE empowers our workforce to develop innovative solutions that directly benefit the fleet.”



NSWC PHD TEAM AT THE DEPARTMENT OF WAR PENTAGON LAB DAY.



FROM LEFT, NSWC PORT HUENEME DIVISION CHIEF ENGINEER CAPT. RICHARD DULDULAO, MIKE CONFESSORE, LEAD SOFTWARE ENGINEER WITH NAVAL AIR WARFARE CENTER AIRCRAFT DIVISION (NAWCAD) LAKEHURST, AND NSWC PORT HUENEME DIVISION ENGINEER FATIMA ALBA AND COMPUTER SCIENTIST NICK BERNSTEIN, MEMBERS OF NSWC PORT HUENEME DIVISION’S AUGMENTED REALITY MAINTENANCE SYSTEM (ARMS) TEAM, REPRESENTED ARMS AND THE NAVAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ESTABLISHMENT AT THE DEPARTMENT OF WAR’S ANNUAL LAB DAY AT THE PENTAGON IN ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA, MAY 6, 2026. (U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY BERNARDO FULLER)



THE PORT OF HUENEME

STEAMING AHEAD: PORT OF HUENEME SECURES \$11.25M FEDERAL GRANT TO EXPAND CAPACITY AND MODERNIZE INFRASTRUCTURE

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FUNDING WILL IMPROVE EFFICIENCY, SAFETY, AND CAPACITY TO MEET FUTURE CARGO-HANDLING REQUIREMENTS.

ZACH BALIVA

PORT HUENEME, CA – May 7, 2026 – The Port of Hueneme was awarded \$11,250,000 in federal funding on April 28 through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration (MARAD) as part of the competitive Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP). The investment brings needed wharf and berth upgrades to streamline operations at one of the nation's leading hubs for fresh produce and automobiles.

"Strategic investments like this ensure the Port of Hueneme remains a reliable, forward-looking gateway for global trade," said Jason Hodge, President of the Oxnard Harbor District Board of Harbor Commissioners. "This funding will allow us to continue delivering economic value for our region while supporting a more resilient national supply chain."

This project represents an important step forward for the Port, enhancing safety, adapting infrastructure to meet evolving maritime demands, and reinforcing its strategic role in national defense and economic vitality. It is a key component of the Port's long-term capital development strategy and will leverage a previous \$80 million award from the California State Transportation Agency's (CalSTA) Port and Freight Infrastructure Program (PFIP).

The project's wharf improvements will increase capacity, provide workforce development opportunities for the Ventura County community, and strengthen the Port's resilience and competitiveness. An important dredging component will complete the Port's 25-year harbor-wide deepening program, ensuring safe navigation for larger vessels and accommodating customer needs. This includes taking about 25,300 cubic yards of berth-side sand to help replenish the adjacent beach in the City of Port Hueneme.

The PIDP grant underscores ongoing efforts from local, state, and federal partners to strengthen California's trade systems.

"We are grateful for the Administration's investment in our Port which positions us to grow import/export opportunities and create good-paying jobs for our community. It takes a strong delegation of congressional leaders including U.S. Senators Adam Schiff and Alex Padilla, and U.S. Representatives Julia Brownley, Vince Fong, and John Garamendi to make these projects happen," said Kristin Decas, CEO and Port Director.

The Port of Hueneme plays a vital role in California's economy; continued federal investment ensures the Port can meet increasing demand while maintaining its commitment to improve quality of life and catalyze prosperity for the local community.

About the Port of Hueneme

The Port of Hueneme is one of the most productive and efficient commercial trade gateways for niche cargo on the West Coast. Five locally elected Port Commissioners govern the Port. The Port consistently ranks among the top ten U.S. ports for automobiles and fresh produce. Port operations support the community by bringing \$2.8 billion in economic activity and creating 25,000 trade-related jobs. Trade through the Port of Hueneme generates more than \$236 million in direct and related state and local taxes, which fund vital community services. In 2017, the Port of Hueneme became the first port in California to become Green Marine certified and was voted the Greenest Port in the U.S. at the Green Shipping Summit.



NAVFAC EXWC

WIRED FOR INNOVATION: FIRST ROBOTICS COMPETITION BRINGS CALIFORNIA TALENT TO THE PORT OF HUENEME



ROBOTICS IN ACTION AT THE FIRST ROBOTICS CA DISTRICT HUENEME PORT EVENT 2026 1,200 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FROM AROUND THE STATE COME TOGETHER TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR ENGINEERING PROWESS AT THE CALIFORNIA DISTRICT QUALIFYING EVENT.

[PORT HUENEME, CA – MARCH 9, 2026] – IT WAS A WEEKEND OF GEARS, GRIT, AND GLORY AS THE PORT OF HUENEME PROUDLY WELCOMED THE ANNUAL FIRST ROBOTICS COMPETITION FOR THE FIFTH YEAR IN A ROW. THIS EXCITING TWO-DAY EVENT IS HELD INSIDE THE FATHOMWERX LAB — A DYNAMIC SPACE FOR INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER BETWEEN THE PORT OF HUENEME, NAVAL SEA SYSTEMS COMMAND (NAVSEA), NAVAL FACILITIES ENGINEERING SYSTEMS COMMAND (NAVFAC), THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COLLABORATIVE, AND MATTER LABS.

ZACH BALIVA

1,200 high school students from around the state come together to demonstrate their engineering prowess at the California District Qualifying Event.

Robotics in action at the FIRST Robotics CA District Hueneme Port Event 2026

The Hueneme Port qualifying event attracted hundreds of enthusiastic spectators cheering on high-energy teams of young people who build and program robots designed to maneuver objects, overcome obstacles, and compete in alliance-based challenges. This year's REBUILT motif

celebrates archaeology-themed innovation and challenged students to reimagine the past as they deployed STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education principles to build their robots.

“We’re excited to host FIRST Robotics as part of the work we do to bring people into the STEM and maritime fields,” said Oxnard Harbor District Board President Jason Hodge. “We know that this collaborative environment serves as a springboard to what is going to be a great future for these young people.”

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NAVFAC EXWC

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A team from Calexico High School guides its robot in competition

Earlier this year, leaders from the Port of Hueneme presented a \$10,000 sponsorship to Hueneme High's Thunder Vikes robotics team with an additional \$5,000 matching commitment if the team raises \$5,000 on its own.

cities presented FIRST California Robotics a special certificate of recognition for their work to empower and inspire the next generation of innovators. Educators, elected officials, families, friends, judges, and mentors watched with excitement as 42 teams from around the state pitted their robot alliances against each other to win a spot at the FIRST California SoCal State Championship.



A TEAM FROM CALEXICO HIGH SCHOOL GUIDES ITS ROBOT IN COMPETITION

The Vikes returned for their second year of competition led by Captain Miguel Rodriguez, who explained how the program has helped him develop new skills. "Participating in FIRST Robotics means you will be exposed to many different aspects of engineering, like CAD, manufacturing, building, coding, electronics, and many more hands-on experiences. It also means you get to work in a team and, in a way, be a part of a family."

The event kicked off as a master of ceremonies welcomed participants and spectators to the FATHOMWERX lab where dignitaries from the Oxnard Harbor District and surrounding

Oxnard Harbor District Board President Jason Hodge (center) and Commissioner Celina Zacarias (right) present a Certificate of Recognition to FIRST Robotics representative Aimee Beck

"The Port is deeply committed to empowering students and developing the future workforce, and hosting the FIRST Robotics competition goes hand-in-hand with this mission," said Port of Hueneme CEO Kristin Decas. "Observing the competition and the students' hard work in action stands out as one of the Port's finest annual highlights."

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NAVFAC EXWC

After two days of competition, the winning alliance consisted of Team 2637 (Phantom Catz from Palos Verdes Peninsula High School in Rolling Hills Estates), Team 3128 (Aluminum Narwhals from Canyon Crest Academy in San Diego), and Team 1138 (Eagle Engineering from Chaminade College Prep School in Canoga Park).



OXNARD HARBOR DISTRICT BOARD PRESIDENT JASON HODGE (CENTER) AND COMMISSIONER CELINA ZACARIAS (RIGHT) PRESENT A CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION TO FIRST ROBOTICS REPRESENTATIVE AIMEE BECK

Several teams were also recognized for their achievements both on and off the field.

The FIRST Impact Award, FIRST Robotics Competition's most prestigious honor recognizing teams that create the largest

positive impact through STEM outreach and community engagement, was awarded to Team 5817 (Uni-Rex from Sanger West High School in Fresno). With this award, Team 5817 qualifies to advance to the SoCal District State Championship in Anaheim on April 10-12, 2026.

Teams competing in California's district model earn District Points at their first two events based on their qualification ranking, playoff performance,

and awards. At the end of the district event season, the top 60 Southern California teams by District Points advance to the Southern California District Championship, where they compete for a chance to qualify for the FIRST Championship in Houston.



