

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0545

March 31, 2021

General David H. Berger

Commandant of the Marine Corps
Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps
3000 Marine Corps, Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-3000

Dear General Berger,

We write to you regarding the impending closure of the Flying Leatherneck Museum (the Museum) located at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Miramar and to request that the Marine Corps keep the Museum's collection intact until there can be a thorough review of alternative sites in Southern California. Marine Corps aviation is an important part of our local history, with such storied bases as the former MCAS Tustin and MCAS El Toro and area natives like WWII Marine fighter ace John Lucian Smith. As such, the Museum should stay in Southern California. We ask that the Marine Corps pause its current efforts in order to coordinate with Museum management and local municipalities to find an alternative site.

The Flying Leatherneck Museum is the only museum in the country devoted solely to Marine Corps aviation. It was founded in 1989 at former MCAS El Toro in Orange County and relocated to MCAS Miramar in 1999 when El Toro closed. The Museum is home to 48 aircraft including "Lady Ace," the helicopter that evacuated the U.S. ambassador from the rooftop of the embassy in Saigon on April 30, 1975. It is run jointly by the Marine Corps and the Flying Leatherneck Historical Foundation (the Foundation), and prior to the pandemic, it attracted more than 35,000 visitors annually. Nonetheless, in February, MCAS Miramar announced it could no longer afford the Museum's \$460,000 annual budget, and on March 28 the Museum closed to the public.

There is significant interest in keeping the Museum in Southern California, including potentially bringing it back to its original home at former MCAS El Toro. On March 23, 2021, the City of Irvine formalized its interest in housing the Museum with a unanimous vote by the city council directing staff to create a plan to relocate the museum to the Orange County Great Park, located at the former base. The City of Irvine hopes to coordinate with the Marine Corps to discuss this possibility. In the unlikely event the Great Park is not a viable option, there may be other

options, including the historic former MCAS Tustin. Our understanding is that the Foundation is ready to oversee relocation of the Museum.

Given the lack of prior coordination with the Foundation, the expressed interest of the City of Irvine in providing a home for the Museum, and the historical significance of Marine Corps aviation to Southern California, we ask that you delay disassembling the Museum's collection and work with local stakeholders to identify a new permanent home in our area. We believe that veterans, students, and others in our community should be able to remember and honor those who served by visiting the Flying Leatherneck Museum. With more time, we are confident in our ability to find a mutually agreeable solution.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter and look forward to your response no later than Friday, April 9.

Sincerely,



Katie Porter
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Michelle Steel
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Lou Correa
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Cc: Col. Charles Dockery, Commanding Officer, MCAS Miramar
James Lukeman (USMC-Ret.), President & CEO, Marine Corps Heritage Foundation