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SUBJ/CNO MESSAGE TO THE FLEET HOLIDAY LEAVE PLANNING DURING COVID-19//

RMKS/1. Shipmates, as your CNO, I could not be more proud of how our Navy has resolutely stood the watch during this extraordinary time of COVID-19. When parts of the world shut down in response to COVID-19, our operational tempo did not decline. Together, we have rapidly developed and applied lessons learned so that our Fleet remains where we should be, forward deployed and ready for whatever challenge comes our way. No doubt, our success is due to the personal dedication and discipline of all Sailors active and reserve, uniformed and civilian and their families.

2. While I know that operating during COVID-19 has been hard on you and your families, your health remains my number one priority. As the virus surges again across the nation, we cannot give in to fatigue and must exercise continued vigilance. We must apply COVID-19 protocols at all times. Our guard cannot come down, not even one inch.

3. During the holiday season, this will be even tougher. Force health protection remains our number one priority. While many of you may not be able to return home this holiday season as you normally would, develop a deliberate plan to recharge your batteries, strengthen your connections, build resiliency, and simply take a break where you can.

4. When developing holiday leave plans, I expect commanders to be mindful that our people remain our number one asset and the physical and mental health and readiness of our Sailors is our top priority. Look for opportunities to expand leave windows to maximize options for your Sailors. Take a hands-on approach to find balanced solutions that allow everyone to take a well-deserved break. In cases where individual leave plans are not supportable, be fully transparent and completely engaged with affected Sailors to mitigate the impact as much as possible. If you are able to travel, carefully follow state, local and host nation COVID-19 regulations while on leave. Personnel executing a Restriction of Movement (ROM) are considered to be in a duty status and ROM periods will not be counted as annual leave.

5. Last, in the same way that we cannot afford to lose one Sailor to COVID-19, we cannot afford to lose one Sailor, or member of our navy family, to suicide. Be bold in having hard discussions with those in your circle of influence. Be humble in admitting when you are stretched beyond your ability to cope. Watch out for each other and be attune to the impact this pandemic and our OPTEMPO is having on our Sailors.

6. Safe, healthy, and ready is how we want to enter 2021. Together, we will make this happen. For those who will remain forward deployed, defending our nation this holiday season, thank you and Godspeed. You and your families are in our collective thoughts and prayers.

7. Never more proud to be your CNO. See you in the Fleet, Shipmates.

8. Released by Admiral Mike Gilday, Chief of Naval Operations.//

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