

DUNCAN HUNTER  
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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

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May 18, 2011

The Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
1000 Navy Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20350-1000

Dear Secretary Mabus:

The decision to name the last of the 14 Lewis and Clark-class cargo ships under construction in San Diego after labor activist Cesar Chavez was brought to my attention yesterday, when I was notified by the Department of the Navy. While it appears the Navy is committed to this decision, with a formal naming ceremony scheduled today, I want to remind you about a great American hero who showed even greater pioneering spirit when he led a team of Marines into a house during combat in Fallujah, Iraq.

Marine Corps Sergeant Rafael Peralta, a Hispanic-American who grew up in Southeast San Diego, was nominated for the Medal of Honor for smothering a grenade with his body, saving the lives of the other Marines who entered the room with him. After examining the forensic evidence, a team of specialists working under the Department of Defense determined that Peralta did not consciously pull the grenade into his body and, as a result, downgraded the Medal of Honor nomination to the Navy Cross—the second highest award for valor in the Marine Corps. Still, the Marines by Peralta's side, as well as his chain-of-command, insist he knowingly pulled the grenade into his body.

Naming the last ship in the Lewis and Clark-class after anyone other than hometown hero Rafael Peralta misses a valuable opportunity to honor the service and sacrifice of a U.S. Marine who was wrongfully denied the Medal of Honor. Even with this class of ships dedicated to visionaries and pioneers, there is no better choice than Sergeant Peralta for his service and sacrifice.

In light of the decision to name a ship after Cesar Chavez, I urge the Navy to give immediate consideration to naming the next available vessel after Marine Corps Sergeant Rafael Peralta.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Duncan Hunter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "H".

Duncan Hunter  
Member of Congress