MILLER, GEORGE
WASHINGTON - On the eve of the 57th anniversary of the deadliest home front explosion of World War II, U.S. Congressman George Miller (D-CA) is leading a renewed congressional effort to win a presidential pardon for black sailors convicted of mutiny following the disaster.

Miller previously led a successful effort to secure a pardon for Freddie Meeks of Los Angeles, one of 50 black sailors convicted after the explosion at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine east of San Francisco on July 17, 1944. Earlier, Miller had secured a Navy review of the case and won passage of legislation that created the Port Chicago National Memorial in 1992, honoring more than 300 victims of the blast. The conviction of another sailor was reversed in 1994 on medical grounds by the Navy in response to a congressionally ordered review of the cases.

Miller said that it remains a priority to see justice carried out despite the passage of time.

"The events surrounding Mr. Meeks' pardon - including news coverage, television documentaries, and even a full length film - helped educate all of us about the travesty of justice that occurred in the segregated Navy of 1944," said Miller.

"His pardon and the Memorial have helped the nation understand what happened in 1944 and how it helped pave the way for desegregation of the military and the society in general. But we have not cleared the record yet because 48 men still have an undeserved mark next to their names that should be removed."

The letter, being sent on July 17th, urges President Bush, "based on the substantial evidence about the case developed in conjunction with the Meeks appeal, to use your presidential power to issue pardons or other appropriate Executive clemency to the remaining 48 sailors who should never have been tried for or convicted of mutiny in the first place.

(more)

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"Such an action would help bring closure to the many members of the families..."
of men who have passed away and to many more - including the relatives and descendants of those who perished at Port Chicago - who have come to see the elderly sailors' burden as an important cause."

Miller noted that the California Legislature unanimously passed a resolution urging pardons in the Port Chicago case, and that a similar resolution is working its way through the New York State Legislature now.

"The men are very old or long gone," said Miller. "The traditional pardon application process just isn't going to work in this case. The merits of the case were made evident in the Meeks appeal, and a comparable level of clemency should now be shown to the remaining sailors, and their families, who have borne this unjust burden throughout their lives.

"We are hopeful that President Bush will give quick consideration to our request and use this anniversary as an opportunity to set the historical record straight about Port Chicago," Miller said.

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