Class of 2020 Families, Supporters and Friends of the Naval Academy:

Thank you for sharing your thoughts, ideas, and concerns regarding the recent decision for the U.S. Naval Academy Class of 2020’s graduation and commissioning ceremony.

The decision to pursue a virtual ceremony was a difficult decision and was not made lightly. It was done in a very careful and deliberate manner. Multiple courses of action were considered (and reflect what many of you have proposed as alternatives), with keen attention paid to the risks and benefits of each, as well as second, third and fourth order effects. The safety and well-being of our midshipmen, faculty, staff, coaches, as well as their families and the local Annapolis community have been my top priority from day one of this pandemic, and were the guiding principles in making a decision about our commissioning ceremony this year.

Our planning considerations accounted for many factors, including but not limited to: the uncertainty of various national and regional COVID-19 models; Department of Defense stop movement orders and restriction of movement (ROM) requirements; federal/presidential guidance on social distancing and maximum group sizes; and the current limitations of our available testing capabilities combined with the ability for asymptomatic individuals to transmit COVID-19. We also aimed to be sensitive to the state of affairs in Maryland. The current demands for follow-on Fleet and Marine Corps schools limited our options to extend graduation into June or later.

Per the CDC, 25-50% of coronavirus carriers are asymptomatic, and those individuals can transmit the infection to others, with the potential for risk to human life while in transit, on the Yard, and in the surrounding Annapolis community. Considering this, and after exhausting all alternatives, I made the difficult decision to proceed with a virtual commissioning ceremony for the Class of 2020. This decision was made in consultation with the Governor of Maryland, Mayor of Annapolis, Chief of Naval Operations, and current Acting Secretary of the Navy. While everyone shared their disappointment of not having an in-person event to celebrate this milestone, all were in unanimous agreement.

More guidance is forthcoming on how we will make this ceremony unique and as personal as possible. While remotely participating in the virtual ceremony, we expect that the Class of 2020 and their families will comply with existing federal and state guidelines for social distancing requirements and group size. This is mission essential to the safe and successful execution of our commissioning and graduation event. Of note, we highly encourage our Class of 2020 graduates to conduct private swearing-in ceremonies and share them with us.

The Naval Academy Class of 2020 is remarkable. Each of them, through their talent, diligent efforts, and perseverance has demonstrated their readiness to serve and lead as officers in the world’s finest Navy and Marine Corps. Nothing, not even the lack of an in-person graduation and commissioning event, will take that away from them. While we recognize the
accomplishments of the Class of 2020, the commissioning ceremony is also about what the Class of 2020 is being called to do. The Class of 2020 is being commissioned in truly historic and uncertain times, and as throughout our history during peace and war, our nation and our Navy turn to the Naval Academy to produce graduates to lead and serve the nation.

Because so many of you have shared your ideas, concerns, and questions, we’ve generated FAQs that we will continually update and will be available at https://www.usna.edu/COVID-19. Given the dynamic nature of the pandemic, our response is an “all hands on deck” effort for my staff on a daily basis. With this in mind, I kindly request you take a look at the FAQ section prior to contacting our office as many of your concerns and ideas have already been voiced. We have done our best to provide thorough responses for everyone to see. Thank you for your continued support of our midshipmen.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

S. S. BUCK
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy
Superintendent