

Letters to the Editor Charleston Post and Courier

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Letter: Keep Clamagore in Charleston

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Why are South Carolina taxpayers paying \$2.5 million to provide a tourist attraction for Florida?

I recently learned that the S.C. House Finance Committee has obligated \$2.5 million to facilitate the move of the submarine Clamagore (SS-343) to Florida to become a diving reef for tourists.

For the past several years the Florida Legislature has attempted to raise the funds to move the Clamagore. These efforts have failed, and now South Carolina taxpayers are being asked to provide the funds.

Mac Burdette, Patriots Point's executive director, will tell you one of the reasons they want to dispose of the submarine is because they fear it could sink at the pier and cause an ecological disaster in a hurricane. This is simply not true.

A submarine, unlike a surface ship, has a thick pressure hull allowing it to dive to 500 feet. The Clamagore's hull has no corrosion or damage. There is no water leaking into the boat. When you look at the boat today, the damage you see is rust and corrosion on the superstructure.

Another reason given by Mr. Burdette for disposing of this piece of history is that it is too expensive to maintain.

There are hundreds of former submarine sailors in the Charleston area who would be eager and willing to help repair and maintain the boat at no cost to the state. We know that the cost to repair the superstructure and drydock the boat is much less than the figure given by Patriots Point.

When the Navy loaned the boat to South Carolina, the state signed an agreement saying it would maintain the Clamagore in good shape. This has not been done.

Why does Patriots Point really want to dispose of the Clamagore? We believe the answer lies on a large drawing in Mr. Burdette's office. It shows high rises, condominiums and homes on vacant Patriots Point land. This was his idea of how to make the museum profitable.

A museum is never built for profit. Museums are for people, especially children, to see, hear about and touch history. Thousands of visitors have been able to visit the Yorktown, Laffey and Clamagore, and experience the conditions that World War II sailors and submariners experienced. This is why we are spending money to restore another piece of naval history, the H.L. Hunley.

Today, Clamagore is the last of the GUPPY III subs in existence. She is also a National Historic Landmark.

When several former submariners learned of the plans to dispose of the Clamagore, they banded together and formed the Clamagore Restoration and Maintenance Association, a 501(c)(3), to raise the funds to save her. They love the history of this boat and want to save her for future generations to enjoy.

We feel South Carolina should keep the Clamagore here as a tourist attraction instead of paying \$2.5 million in South Carolina taxpayer money to provide Florida a tourist attraction.

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