

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Senate Aerospace Caucus
Washington, D.C.
25 September, 2013

Thank you so much for that introduction. I want to thank you for having me here to talk with you, and thank everyone for coming out this evening. I also want to thank you all for the support and concern you have expressed following the tragedy at the Washington Navy Yard last week. This was here at home. This was an ordinary day that turned into a horrible day.

The United States military and the job that it does, is inherently dangerous. We lost two SH-60 helicopter pilots this week. We grieve for them, but to lose civilians within sight of the Capitol on just another workday hits very close to home. So thank you for your expressions, for what you have said, and what you have done.

The thing I wanted to say about Senator Murray is that she is one of the few Senators who represents all three of the areas the Navy works in: above, on, and under the surface. And she does so in a remarkably good way, and she has been an incredible to work for during my four years here in this job and I look forward to working with her as we look toward the future.

One of the strengths of our system is the teamwork of our uniformed Sailors and Marines, our Navy civilians, the political leadership here in Washington, and our industry partners. We have a historic partnership between the Navy and Marine Corps and the American people. We need to make sure we strengthen that teamwork, and honor that partnership, as we face some of these problems that are rapidly approaching.

The value of the Navy and Marine Corps is as apparent today as it was at the founding of our republic. Enshrined in our Constitution is the direction to Congress to “provide and maintain a Navy.” There is a reason for including “maintain.” At that time, the Navy was one tangible signal of our independence and our presence on the world’s stage. Today, 238 years later, we play a large and vital role on that same stage. The framers of the Constitution understood that the Navy had to provide constant and persistent presence—it had to be “maintained.” Presence is what the Navy and Marine Corps are all about.

When the news of a chemical attack in Syria flashed across our televisions the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps was already there, in the Mediterranean and the waters of the Middle East. We didn’t have to surge our ships. We didn’t have to surge equipment. It was the same when the earthquake and tsunami struck Japan in 2011, or the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. The nation has immediate options because of our immediate presence.

Our ability to respond is not determined by anybody else; by over-flight permission or basing rights, or by how quickly we can mobilize and move our forces half a world away. Our ships are sovereign U.S. territory. Our platforms at sea ensure that we do not take up an inch of anyone else’s land. Today naval presence provides the credible threat of action which makes diplomacy possible, as the President said the other day.

Before the bell rings and long after the guns fall silent, presence means we are where it counts, not just when it counts, but all the time.

Four key factors make our global presence possible. And they have to be our priorities as we look ahead. We must focus on people, platforms, power, and partnerships, because they all matter.

Today I'm going focus on our platforms, and particularly about aviation, both today and what the future may bring depending on the results of sequester and the possibility of more continuing resolutions.

From the days of our first six frigates, to Eugene Ely's first landing aboard USS PENNSYLVANIA more than 100 years ago, to the incredible marvels we build and fly today, our technological edge has always been critical to our Navy and Marine Corps. It is our responsibility, it's our obligation, to make certain our Sailors and Marines have the right platforms today and the right platforms tomorrow.

I'm going to talk about ships for a moment. I know this is an aerospace event, but the way we get our airplanes where we need them, is by ship. The number of ships and aircraft on the backs of those ships is what gives us the capacity to provide our global presence. We have the most advanced platforms in the world, but quantity also is a quality all its own. I've said this many times before, but it is important to understand how we got to our current fleet size. On 9/11, 2001, we had 316 ships in the United States Navy. By 2008, after one of the great military buildups in our history, that number dropped to 278 ships.

In the four years before I took office as Secretary of the Navy the Navy only put 19 ships under contract. That continued the downward trend in the size of our Fleet. Since I took office in 2009, 60 ships have been put under contract and by 2019 our current plan we will have the fleet back to 300 ships. Now we've done this in a number of ways – spending smarter and more efficiently through things like competition, multi-year buys, and, frankly, driving some hard bargains on behalf of taxpayer, have created the way to provide our nation and our Navy with the platforms we need to execute our missions.

And we've done that through a partnership with industry. We owe industry certain things. We owe them stable designs. We owe them a look at what we intend to build for the fleet so they can think anew. They are making investments in infrastructure and training to produce these things. And I think we've done a great deal in working with industry. Since 2009, the Department of the Navy has procured more than 1000 fixed-wing, rotary-wing and unmanned aircraft. That includes over 200 MH-60 Seahawk helicopters, 138 MV-22 Ospreys for the Marines and over 200 variants of F/A-18, both Super Hornets and Growlers. Those programs and others, like the P-8 Poseidon, are great examples of how we have used our acquisition excellence initiatives to develop the most capable combat systems in the world.

This year we continued to make advances in our unmanned systems. The successful carrier landing and launch of the X-47B unmanned aircraft aboard USS BUSH was pretty astounding. The success of the Fire Scout unmanned helicopter, and the continuing development of the Triton Broad Area Maritime Surveillance aircraft all indicate that our force could rapidly begin integrating more unmanned systems.

But today all of these platforms, a key part of what makes our global presence possible, are at risk because we lack a flexible, strategically-guided approach to spending cuts on defense. The rigid structure of sequester, and the inflexible continuing resolutions that result from the annual inability to pass a budget on time. They don't allow us to set priorities. They don't allow us to be strategic, and they force mindless decisions.

Sequester, if it continues for very long, can also cause us to lose much of our progress in building our aviation fleet. As Secretary I have done everything I can to protect aircraft procurement and shipbuilding. But, if sequester continues, I can't do it forever. We could be forced to break multi-year contracts. This causes the price of the platforms that are left to go up and cancels out much of the savings. So we get fewer ships and aircraft for more money and achieve few savings. Tell me that's smart.

Everything under multi-year contracts or block buys, like the MH-60 helicopters or V-22 Ospreys for the Marines, could have this happen. If Sequester continues in FY15 we could have to cut the purchase of around 25 aircraft. It will also almost certainly impact our future programs like the Joint Strike fighter. And it will force us to cut money from our research and development programs, impacting how quickly we can develop and field the manned and unmanned aircraft of the future .

Sadly, that's not all. As everyone in this room knows, new construction is only part of what keeps naval aviation in the skies and what keeps the ships afloat. Maintenance and

modernization is what ensures the aircraft and ships we already have are fully capable and ready for their missions. But our maintenance accounts are at risk as well. In fact, because of the rigid limits of how sequester cuts and the continuing resolutions are made by law, maintenance accounts feel the effects quickly.

Under a continuing resolution the Navy our ability to put aircraft into depot for maintenance is impacted. Sequester multiplies this because there is even less money to maintain the aircraft we already have. So naval aviation could get smaller and our smaller force not as maintained, and not as ready.

Starting in the first quarter of next year we will probably be forced to start cutting the depot level maintenance for some of our aviation fleet. We've worked hard to protect the squadrons that are deploying, and the ones who come after them, but we have to put pretty much everything else on the table. We're looking at the possibility that we will park nearly 200 aircraft because we don't have the money to fix them. Add on top of that suspending depot work on over 500 engines. Our accounts for weapons will also be cut, effecting the purchase of hundreds of missiles and weapons from the aerospace industry.

I know that this caucus is focused on the important work of our aerospace industrial base, and so am I. Our aerospace workers are skilled, experienced, and critical and they can't be easily replaced. We can't let them go away and assume they will come back. We saw this with shipbuilding in my own state of Mississippi. Ingalls shipbuilding was nearly totally destroyed by

the hurricane. They lost several thousand shipyard workers. And it has taken them years to rebuild that workforce. And the same thing applies to aviation.

The skills of our Sailors and Marines are also part of what make naval aviation as combat effective as it is today. But I'm worried about the training and readiness of our pilots, aircrew, and maintenance professionals. To do their job in the way we expect them to do it, our Sailors and Marines have to be incredibly well trained. Because of the way the continuing resolution and sequester operate, we are forced to cut the money from a very limited list of places. Training and operations are among the few places we can go to. Already, our ships are going to sea less, our pilots are flying less, and our Marines are going to the field less.

As Secretary Hagel has said, letting the inflexible, across the board cuts of sequestration persist would be a huge strategic miscalculation. In order to keep our deploying units at the proper readiness we have already borrowed against our future. Those bills are coming due.

Having said all this; let me be clear: None of this means that we cannot or should not spend less on defense. None of this means we cannot or should not find more savings. Coming out of two long land wars, the American people have the right to expect that we will spend less in the Pentagon. But, do we continue the mindless, non-strategic, un-prioritized cuts embodied in sequestration and continuing resolutions? Without priorities? Without strategy?

In my mind a much better way is to reduce spending in a smart and thoughtful way protecting our capabilities by setting priorities and protecting our capabilities. A far better way is to look in

un-remitting detail at every expenditure and put our dollars in support of the Defense Strategic Guidance.

It is absolutely imperative that Congress act to prevent the harm of sequester from coming to pass. In the meantime, the Chief of Naval Operations, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and I and the civilian and military leadership of the Department of the Navy are doing everything we possibly can to forestall, and where possible, prevent, irrevocable harm to our warfighting capabilities and readiness.

Our Navy and our Marine Corps offer the President and the American people options, the threat of action and the opportunity for diplomacy. But unless we act to address the damage of continuing resolutions and sequester, they are options which may be limited or unavailable in the future.

It is my hope, indeed it is my obligation, as Secretary of the Navy, to do all that I can to ensure these options are available to not just our current President, but also our future Presidents, and to future generations of Americans.

Next week, we will celebrate the Navy's birthday, and the Marine Corps a month after that. For almost 238 years our Navy and Marine Corps have established a proven record as an agile and adaptable force. Forward deployed, we remain the most responsive option to defend the United States of America.

We must endeavor, even through these difficult and uncertain times, to keep it so.

From the Navy, Semper Fortis, Always Courageous.

From the Marine Corps, Semper Fideles, Always Faithful.

Thank you.