

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
Remarks on Memorial Day at Fleet Week New York  
Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, Riverside Park, New York City, New York  
Monday, May 25, 2015

Thank you so very much to our very distinguished guests here today, and most importantly to those serving and to our veterans, and to the families of those who did not come back.

I want to talk to you very briefly about three things – about the Navy and Marine Corps, about Fleet Week and about Memorial Day. U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps are the world's most formidable expeditionary fighting force, the greatest fighting force that's ever been assembled.

We are where it counts when it counts, around the globe and around the clock. We get places faster, we can stay longer, we bring whatever we need and we don't have to ask anybody's permission to get the job done. We give our leaders options in times of crisis.

Best example is when the decision was made to strike ISIS, we had a carrier on station in less than 30 hours conducting strikes. And for 54 days, we were the only option. And it wasn't because we didn't have other aircraft in the area. We did. But those countries wouldn't let our aircraft take off armed to strike. We didn't have to ask. We were taking off from sovereign American territory of the carrier.

To get this presence, this worldwide presence, being there when it counts, we rely on four fundamentals: People, our Sailors and Marines. We have the best force we have ever had, but they walk in the footsteps of Sailors and Marines from generations before us.

Second, platforms – quantity has a quality all its own. Our fleet has declined from that awful day of 9/11 when we were 316 ships. By 2008 we were down to 278 ships. In the five years before I took this office, we only put 27 ships under contract – not enough to reverse the slide of the size of the fleet and not enough to keep our shipyards going. But in the first five years I have been secretary, we have put 70 ships under contract. And we are going to get above 300 ships again by the end of this decade.

Third is power, how we fuel those ships, those aircraft. And I'm trying to move the Navy, and we're doing it, off fossil fuels so that fuel cannot be used as a weapon against us.

And finally, partnerships – partnerships with our international neighbors, partnerships with industry, and partnerships with the American people – which brings me to Fleet Week.

What a great institution Fleet Week is. The United States Navy and the United States Marine Corps are America's away team. We don't have any home games. When we're doing our job, we're usually a long, long way from home. And Fleet Week gives a chance to connect the people who are doing the protecting to the people being protected. These Sailors and Marines, these Coast Guardsmen, Air Force, Army brethren are the true 1 percent – the 1 percent that protect the other 99 percent of us.

And when you get a chance to see them, interact and walk up to them, I want to ask you to do a couple things. One is if you'll take a selfie with a Sailor or a Marine and post it on social media. For every one of those posted, TNT gives a dollar to the USO. So you can do good in a couple of ways there.

But second, and I've seen this happening all over New York, talk to those Sailors and Marines, talk to those Coast Guardsmen. Ask them where they're from. Ask them what they do, because the people of the United States don't get a chance very often to see just how skilled, just how talented our Sailors and Marines, our Coast Guardsmen, all our armed services are, just how hard the jobs we ask them to do day in and day out, and just how good they are at doing it.

You – let me tell you about my Fleet Week so far, just for a minute. A life-long Red Sox fan – sorry – (applause) – I got to throw out the first pitch at the Yankees game on Saturday. And I was the best pitcher the Yankees had on Saturday. (Laughter.) But then Saturday night, my wife and our 14-year-old daughter and I were coming back from dinner and we ran into – we were coming through Time Square and about six or eight Sailors were coming toward us.

And as we walked through them, I said, hi, Sailors. And they went, hey. And about halfway through I said, by the way, I'm the SecNav. And they just kept walking, you know, sure. (Laughter.) And they got about 10 feet away and one of them decided, you know, don't take any chances. He turned around and he said: Mr. Mabus? And I said, yeah. And they all turned and saluted. I think I ruined Fleet Week for them. (Laughter.) They're going to be nervous for the rest of this week. (Laughter.)

But this afternoon – last night I was on the USS San Antonio with a great event there with Sailors and Marines and a lot of New Yorkers. Yesterday morning I was privileged to go to Liberty Park in Jersey City and name the next fast attack submarine, the USS New Jersey, after an absence of 72 years without that name in the fleet. And after this event, just to show I'm even handed, I'm going to swear in 40 new Sailors and Marines and then throw out the first pitch at the Mets game. (Cheers, applause.)

I'm having a great Fleet Week. But the whole idea, amongst all the fun, is, as I said, to reconnect the protected and those that protect – which brings us to the whole purpose of Memorial Day. It's a wonderful day to be with family and friends, to eat some barbeque and take the day off. But we ought to also think of those families – those gold star families for whom they're not going to be with loved ones these days, those that

gave their tomorrows for our today, those that were willing to give everything for us and the families that they left behind.

This country, this unique country, has always been able to count at the times of greatest crisis on its best people stepping forward, willing to risk and lose life and limb for an idea – the idea of America, the idea of this great country. So from a veteran of the late '60s and early '70s, to all of the World War II – we have a lot of important Marines here today – from Korea, from Vietnam, from the first Gulf War, from Iraq, from Afghanistan, from – to the families who wear the Gold Star but who will never see that loved one they sent off again, thank you. Thank you from a very, very grateful nation, and one who has much to be thankful for.

So on this Memorial Day, let's remember those who served, those who serve today, and the reason that this great country still has them [inaudible] today. Thank you very much.