

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Naming Ceremony for USS Delaware
Washington, DC
Monday, 19 November 2012

Well, thank you all for being here. I particularly want to thank Dr. Biden for being here, the senior senator from Delaware, Tom Carper, and the lieutenant governor of Delaware, Matt Denn.

And, Dr. Biden, I understand you have brought your spouse with you.

DR. JILL BIDEN: Yes. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY MABUS: I'm pleased to announce today that one of our most advanced Navy platforms, a fast attack nuclear submarine, SSN-791, will be named USS Delaware. The name Delaware has been prominent and honored throughout our great naval history, but it is a name that has been out of our fleet for too long and I am happy to change that today.

Seven ships have been named for the First State, stretching back to Navy's earliest days of wooden ships under sail. The last USS Delaware was Navy's first Dreadnaught, a coal-burning, steam-powered, "all-big-gun" battleship, but that Delaware decommissioned in 1923.

Delaware will be part of the Virginia class, which are built to excel in traditional areas of submarine warfare, such as against other submarines, against surface targets, against targets on land, but Delaware will have some non-traditional capabilities, as well, gathering intelligence and delivering Navy SEALs undetected to their missions.

During her service, which will begin in 2018, Delaware may patrol the waters from the North Atlantic to the Western Pacific to under the Arctic ice. Construction of the USS Delaware will begin next year and will be shared by two shipyards, Huntington Ingalls in Virginia and General Dynamics Electric Boat in Connecticut.

These submarines are a great success story. They have been on or ahead of schedule and under budget. This summer, we commissioned another one of these great boats, USS Mississippi, well-named.

That submarine set a record for the program's fastest delivery, a year ahead of schedule. The Virginia-class program has been a model for all our ship-building. In 2008, the year before this administration began, our fleet stood at 278 ships, 38 ships fewer than on 9/11/2001. But we have turned that around. While just three ships were built in 2008, we have in the last two years, in spite of a more challenging fiscal environment, put 42 ships under contract, most of them

fixed-price multi-year deals. We've increased competition and oversight, and we're on track to reach 300 ships before the end of the decade.

The Navy is unique in constructing these incredibly complex and technologically advanced platforms that are designed to last for 30, 40, even 50 years. There will be Sailors who serve on Delaware who are not yet born.

Today's Sailors operating these amazing platforms are incredibly talented, highly skilled, and eagerly accept the responsibility we demand from even the most junior crewmember. Most Americans don't realize what Sailors do or even know anyone in the Navy, because less than one percent of our population wears America's cloth. And when the Navy is doing our job, we're most often a long, long way from home. We are truly America's away team.

That's why we named some of our ships for states and other places in America, to remind our home for those who serve and a visible representation of America in every port around the globe. There's always a strong connection between the people of a state and the ship that bears its name.

For that and for many other reasons, I'm very proud to announce also today that Dr. Jill Biden has agreed to serve as sponsor of the USS Delaware. Dr. Biden, as you all know, our nation's Second Lady, a proud Blue Star mom, and a renowned and accomplished educator.

Her military connections run very deep and very strong. Many of us know of Beau Biden's service in the U.S. Army, including a deployment to Iraq. But a couple of weeks ago, it was announced that Dr. Biden's son, Hunter, will receive a commission in the United States Navy as a public affairs officer.

Her support of the military goes far beyond that of the service of her sons. Dr. Biden has co-sponsored with our First Lady, Michelle Obama, the national initiative "Joining Forces", providing support and expanding opportunities, for veterans and active-duty personnel and their families.

That exemplifies the commitment to those who serve and who have served and the strength of character of Jill Biden and of her home, the First State. I know Delaware's citizens will honor their state's namesake, follow her as she comes to life in a few years, and embrace those who sail in her for decades to come, as she, in turn, honors the First State's legacy as she sails the seas in defense of our nation and upholding her state's motto, Freedom and Liberty, and the Navy motto, Semper Fortis, forever courageous.

Now it's my happy privilege to introduce the sponsor of the USS Delaware, Dr. Jill Biden.

DR. BIDEN: Thank you. Thank you, Secretary Mabus, for that kind introduction. This is a very exciting day.

As a proud military mom and a very proud Delawarean, I am honored to sponsor the USS Delaware. One of the best parts of serving as Second Lady is that I have the opportunity to meet with so many members of our military and their families. I am always inspired by their strength and resilience. No matter what challenges they face, our men and women in uniform serve with courage and distinction. They are the reason we have the best, most powerful military in the world. And it's our duty to make sure that they have everything they need to stay safe and do their jobs. They need the very best equipment and technology that we can provide them with, and soon that will include the USS Delaware.

It's a special honor for me to sponsor this submarine, because I'm such a proud military mom. Four years ago, as the secretary alluded to, I stood in Dover, Delaware, watching as our son, Beau, prepared to deploy to Iraq with the Delaware Army National Guard. I remember it like it was yesterday.

And this year, I'm looking forward to standing with our son, Hunter, when he is commissioned as an ensign in the United States Navy. He follows in the footsteps of two of his grandfathers, who have also served in the Navy.

The Navy was a memorable part of my life as a young girl. My father would also always take my mother and his five daughters to watch the Blue Angels at Willow Grove Naval Air Station. His picture in his dress whites was proudly displayed by the front door of our home, and through his stories and beliefs, he ingrained in all of us his sense of patriotism and pride in the Navy.

But most of all, I am honored for my state of Delaware, which is steeped in military history. For Delaware's war hero, Captain Thomas Macdonough, whose famous victory in the Battle of Plattsburgh helped end the War of 1812, to Newcastle, serving as the home of some of the first female Air Force pilots, to the thousands of Delawareans who have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, our state has so much to be proud of. And today, Delaware's 77,000 veterans carry on their rich tradition of service.

This great tradition of having a civilian-sponsored Navy vessels helps to cement the critical connection between our servicemembers and the civilians back home who love them, miss them, and owe them a debt of gratitude.

So in the years to come, I'm looking forward to meeting the Sailors who serve on the boat. I'm excited to get to know their families, because wherever the Delaware goes, all around the world, a little piece of my heart will go with her.

So thank you, Secretary Mabus, for this honor. Thank you all. And may God bless our servicemen and women and their families. Thank you.