

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
USNS John Lewis (T-AO 205) Naming Announcement  
Wednesday, January 6, 2016  
Washington, DC

(In progress) – what our Navy and our Marine Corps uniquely give this country is presence, around the globe, around the clock, being at the right place not just at the right time, but all the time. And there's been some discussion about presence and posture. And it's easy for the Navy, presence is our posture. We've got to be deployed. We've got to be out there to give our leaders options.

We're America's away-team. Sailors and Marines, the ships that they're on, never have permanent homecomings. And I talked about my four Ps to get that presence and posture; people, our Sailors and Marines; platforms, our ships; power, how we fuel those ships and our aircraft; and partnerships. And we're here today to talk about two of those, people and platforms.

We have the best force we've ever had. We put a lot of stress on them. And we're doing things to try to mitigate that stress. But we've got record retention and recruiting. And the morale is incredibly high. And in terms of platforms, one of the things I told a caucus lunch, in the seven and a half years, from October of 2001, right after 9/11, to the beginning of fiscal year 2002 – so for seven and a half years moving forward, the Navy put 41 ships under contract.

I've now been in office almost seven years. And if you look forward till the end of fiscal year '16, the ships that have already been authorized, already appropriated, and those that are already under contract, we will have put 84 ships under contract. More than twice as many, with a budget that is now 25 percent...

And that's thanks to Congress. That is thanks to the partnership we have with Congress and the partnership you represent with the American people, who understand the importance of the Navy. We need a fleet of more than 300 ships. And based on bills that we've got underway now and contracts we're going to let this year, we will get to 300 ships and beyond by the end of this decade.

Now, one of the great privileges I have is naming all Navy ships. Sometimes it's a privilege. Sometimes I get about a hundred suggestions for every ship I have under contract. This one is special. I name ships for people and places that represent our highest values, the things we cherish the most. The Navy motto is Semper Fortis, Always Courageous. If you want to see the definition of courageous, watch the video of the bridge of Selma. Watch what John Lewis did.

I was a teenager not far from there growing up, in Mississippi. And I got to say, John Lewis, you and your colleagues set us all free, white as well as black. You broke those chains of racism that had bound us for so long. And this is not only a ship named for John Lewis, who's dedicated his life to the people of this country. This is the first ship of this class. There are going to be a lot more of these built. This entire class will be the John Lewis-class of ships.

So another privilege I have is doing the naming conventions. And so, for example, destroyers are named after naval heroes or members of Congress, or former Secretaries of the Navy. Aircraft carriers are named for Presidents or other leaders. Amphibs for Marine battles. The John Lewis-class the naming convention will be people who have fought for civil rights and human rights in this country.

So this ship's going to be part of our fleet for decades. There are men and women not yet born who will sail on her. These will be the only Americans a lot of foreigners see. This is a replenishment ship. Our fleet could not do its job, our Marines could not do their job, without these ships. So the story, the legacy of John Lewis will live for decades, not only in this country but around the world.

So I am officially naming T-AO 205 the USNS John Lewis.