

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
USNS Lucy Stone (T-AO 209) and USNS Sojourner Truth (T-AO 210) Naming Ceremony
Boston Public Library
Boston, Massachusetts
Monday, September 19, 2016

Thank you all for being here on a very – on a great Navy day – (laughter) – in terms of a Boston day, it is great.

I spent, perhaps misspent, five years in Boston. I was in the Navy. I was on a ship at the Boston Naval Shipyard, and then a law student across the river for – between 1970 and 1975. I will have to admit that I didn't go to the library very much – (laughter) – but I spent a good deal of time at two institutions close to here: Fenway Park and Boston Garden. (Laughter.)

So thank you all. It's great to be – it's great to be back here. And I'll to put in a plug for my family. My oldest daughter, Elisabeth, has started at Harvard Law School three weeks ago. So I have even more reason to come to Boston today.

Our Navy and our Marines uniquely provide a presence around the world, around the clock. We ensure stability, we reassure allies, we deter potential adversaries, and we provide our nation's leaders with options in times of crisis. We're America's away team. We never get a home game. We don't want a home game, because Sailors, equally in times of peace and war are in the right place not just at the right time, but all of the time. There is no next-best thing to being there. In every case, from high-end combat, irregular warfare, disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, our naval assets get their faster, we stay on the station longer, we bring everything we need, and because we operate from sovereign American territory we don't have to ask any other nation's permission to do the job that we need to do.

But to get that presence, you have to have gray hulls on the horizon. We've reversed the decline in ship level that occurred from 2001 to 2008. In the seven years before I took office, the naval fleet declined from 316 ships to 278 ships. And during that time, 41 ships were put under contract. I've been in office now almost exactly seven years, a little bit more. And in that time, we've contracted 85 ships at a 20 percent smaller top line. And we've done it not at the expensive aircraft. We bought 35 percent were aircraft, that in the previous seven years. With our efforts and the support of Congress, we guaranteed that we will reach 300 ships by 2019 and our assessed need of 308 ships by 2021.

Now, one of the great responsibilities and great privileges that I have is naming these ships. Secretaries of the Navy since the very first one of Benjamin Stoddert in 1798 have not only done the naming of ships, but also providing the naming conventions – like the types of names we're going to give our ships. So submarines are named after states generally. Littoral combat ships, after cities. Destroyers after naval heroes, members of Congress, previous

Secretaries of the Navy. Carriers are normally after Presidents. And amphibious ships after Marine battles. And we do this to honor our history, but also to connect America and the American people to the American Navy.

Honoring naval heroes, Sailors and Marines who have sacrificed so much for this country, is an important way of venerating American values. That's why I've named eight ships after Medal of Honor recipients, people who fought in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. The latest two I named this past Saturday at the Ole Miss-Alabama game. I named two ships after two Mississippians – a pure coincidence that I was governor of that state. (Laughter.)

Two Mississippians: One, Jack Lucas, awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on Iwo Jima. He was one of the youngest Medal of Honor recipients. He lied about his age to get into the Marines. And when he returned home after grabbing two grenades at Iwo Jima, holding them and surviving when they both went off – he came back, he was awarded the Medal of Honor, went back home and started the ninth grade. The other one was General Louis Wilson, awarded the Medal Honor as a young Marine on Guam, and then later became commandant of the Marine Corps in the 1970s. I also named two ships after Navy Cross recipients: Rafael Peralta, for service in Iraq, and Lenah Sutcliffe Higbee, the first woman awarded the Navy Cross.

And as important as that is, it's also important to recognize and honor those who have strived to build the promise laid out in our Constitution to form a more perfect union. Those who fought in a different way for the ideals we cherish as a nation – justice, freedom, and equality. And that's why in January, when we had a new class of ships, we named the first ship the John Lewis after the icon who has dedicated and risked his life for justice, equality and freedom. The naming convention for this new class is to honor those who have fought for civil and for human rights.

The names of the first six ships have been chosen and they've been announced. The first is John Lewis. The second, that I named last month, is the USNS Harvey Milk after the LGBT advocate who was assassinated 10 months after he took office as the first openly gay person to hold office in California. The third I'm going to name in a few weeks, but the name has been announced and it's going to be called the USNS Earl Warren, after the Supreme Court justice whose signal, signature case, *Brown v. Board*, desegregated our schools, and many more cases advancing the cause of civil rights. Tomorrow at the Kennedy Library, I'll name the fourth ship of the class USNS Robert F. Kennedy, who dedicated his life to advancing human rights in hopes of making the dream of a peaceful and just world a reality.

Which brings me to why we're here today, to officially name two more ships, two of the six in this class, in honor of leaders who stood for justice, equality, and freedom. Now, if the weather had been a little more cooperative, we would have been at the Boston Women's Memorial and these bronze statues commemorating the lives, and the struggles, and the triumphs of Abigail Adams, confidant and advisor to President John Adams and a strong advocate of women's rights Phillis Wheatley, a woman kidnapped and enslaved as a young girl, whose poetry inspired leaders in the American Revolution, and finally abolitionist and suffragist Lucy Stone.

Lucy Stone, born into a large family in rural Massachusetts, and despite being discouraged by her father and brothers, she educated herself, worked as a teacher, and became one of the first women in America, and the first in Massachusetts, to earn a college degree. Having experienced discrimination early in her life, she was drawn to the abolitionist movement while studying at Oberlin College. When she graduated, she embarked on a career as a lecturer, leader, and an advocate for human rights. She served in the American Anti-Slavery Society, led the New Jersey Women's Suffrage Association, sat on the executive committee for the American Equal Rights Association. Lucy Stone's influence advanced the rights movement to both women and African Americans.

She helped pave the way for the passage of the 15th Amendment, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous position of servitude." She did this in the face of verbal abuse, physical assault and excommunication. Yet while she would never see that same right for women, she remained to the cause, as is the motto of the Marine Corps, *Semper Fidelis*, Always Faithful. In describing her approach, Lucy Stone once said, "All we need to do is to continue to speak the truth fearlessly, and we shall add to our number those who will turn and scale the side of equal and full of justice in all things."

Which brings me to our second ship. One of Lucy Stone's contemporaries, who spoke the truth fearlessly and displayed the truth about justice, equality and freedom in spirit and in action, and even in her self-chosen name, Sojourner Truth. Born in slavery in Swartekill, New York, in 1797, which was the same year the Navy came – the United States Navy came into existence. By the age of 13, she had experienced daily beatings, was separated from her family as a result of being sold four times, once for \$100 and a few sheep. Some years later, she fell in love with a fellow slave, and saw him beaten to death after their relationship was discovered. In 1826, Sojourner Truth decided she would remain a slave no longer. She fled to freedom with her infant daughter, Sophia, and was forced to leave her other two children behind.

In describing her escape, she said, "I didn't run off, for I thought that wicked. I walked off, believing that to be all right." Shortly after freeing herself, she learned that her son, Peter, then five years old, had been illegally sold to a man in Alabama. She took the issue to court, and eventually would secure Peter's return to her side. The case was the first in which an African American woman successfully challenged a white man in a United States court.

And in the following years, Sojourner Truth lectured in New York, Michigan, and Ohio, many other places, delivering her most famous speech, commonly referred to as the "Ain't I a Woman?", in Akron in 1854. In that speech, she demanded equal human rights for all women and all slaves. Later, in 1853, when an angry mob interrupted her with hisses and groans, she responded, "You may hiss as much as you please, but women will get their rights anyway. You can't stop us, neither" – a comment which pretty much epitomizes our Navy motto, *Semper Fortis*, Forever Courageous.

Both Sojourner Truth and Lucy Stone both relentlessly and ceaselessly called for human rights – even for things like prison reform, property rights, a universal suffrage. Yet abolition

was the only cause for which they fought that there were going to see realized in their own lifetimes. But as Lucy Stone said, “In the long run, every other good thing is sure to be obtained.” And in – and in 1920, the 19th Amendment was passed, guaranteeing women’s right to vote.

Now, unfortunately, in a lot of cases, particularly sometimes in the military, the long run has taken way too long. Despite the fact that women have been fighting and dying in combat since the founding of this nation, when I took office in 2009, female service members weren’t afforded the same opportunities or even the same level of treatment as their male counterparts. In the Navy, women were prohibited from serving on submarines or riverine squadrons and the SEALs.

In the Marine Corps, women were barred from serving in ground combat positions. In both services, sexual assault was left both underreported, under-prosecuted and under-disciplined. And women – you know, a thing that may seem small, but is highly symbolic – were required to wear a different uniform, further segregating them from full participation in the service. But I want you to notice that the person singing the national anthem in that color guard are wearing the exactly the same uniform. We weren’t looking at male Sailors or female Sailors. You were looking at United States Sailors. And that’s the way it ought to be.

So we’ve tried to fix some of the injustices. And we did it in pursuit of a stronger force. I opened service to submarines and riverines to women. And I advocated for opening all positions in all the services to women, which has now been done. I established the first Secretary-level Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, SAPRO, to combat this insidious crime. We led the Department of Defense in extending paid maternity leave. We expanded it from six weeks to 18 weeks, so that women were less likely to have to choose between serving their country and having a family. And finally, just as I said, we’re moving toward one uniform for the Navy, one uniform for the Marines.

Time and again history has shown these are the right things to do. When we integrated the military in the 1940s, when we first recruited largely for women in the 1980s, when we repealed “don’t ask, don’t tell” in 2010 – every time those changes were proposed, every single time, there were naysayers. There were people that said that the force would be weakened and morale would decrease, and that we would be a less-effective military. And every single time – every single time they’ve been wrong. Every time we’ve become stronger. And every time, the Navy and Marine Corps remain the greatest expeditionary fighting force the world has ever known.

We gain strength through diversity – diversity of background, diversity of thought, diversity of perspective. In a military force, it’s a dangerous thing to always think exactly the same way. A predictable force is a defeatable force. It’s not just diversity for diversity’s sake. To fight, to win, now and in the future, we have to recruit, and train, and develop a Navy and Marine Corps from all of America, represented of, reflective of the nation it defends.

If a person qualifies in every way for service, if they qualify in every way to do a particular job, how can we possibly say that they cannot share the honor of the defense of this

nation because of the shape of their skin, color of their skin, because of who they love? We can't. We shouldn't. And now we don't. I think the women represented by these three bronze statues would be proud of the actions that their legacies have inspired.

I started by talking about Navy ships and how presence plays a unique role in the national security. Lucy Stone and other folks believed that the influence of women will save the country before every other power. Since U.S. Navy ships and Navy and Marine Corps presence in many ways are responsible for protecting this country, I think it's benefitting that our two newest ships be influenced by women.

Now, getting to the end, overall, my other great responsibility that I have is the naming of the sponsors of the ships. Sponsors imbue ships with their spirit. Every time there's a new captain of these ships, one of the first calls that the captain makes is to the sponsor. The sponsor breaks the bottle of champagne across the bow and stays in touch with that ship as long as it's in the fleet. So for Lucy Stone, the sponsor – the person who agreed to be the sponsor, a woman who has continued to fight for human rights, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Now, I want to say a few words about the other sponsor. I have known Marian Wright Edelman for years. I have admired her for years. Tomorrow, when I name the Robert Kennedy, I'm going to talk about Marian Wright Edelman, because, as Marian Wright, a young civil rights attorney in Mississippi, she invited Robert Kennedy to the Mississippi Delta. And there were a lot of benefits to that- he emerge a changed person. He essentially eliminated hunger in America over the next few years.

Marian Wright, met a guy name Peter Edelman, Robert Kennedy's aide, who she later married. First African-American woman ever on the Mississippi Bar. And for years, head of the Children's Defense Fund. Here is someone who had dedicated her life, bravely, to equality, to justice, and made sure that the children of this country are able to make the most of their God-given talents. So for the Sojourner Truth, Marian Wright Edelman is the sponsor.

So I want to officially have the honor and privilege to name our latest U.S. replenishment ships USNS Lucy Stone, USNS Sojourner Truth.