

Remarks by the Honorably Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
USS Jackson Commissioning
Gulfport, Mississippi
Saturday, December 5, 2015

Thank you all so much. Admiral, thank you. And this week it is all about beating Army. We will beat them for the 14th straight year. (Laughter, applause.) Sorry, General.

To Senator Thad Cochran, here today in an aide capability to his daughter, the sponsor, Kate Cochran; to Governor Phil Bryant, the governor of the great state of Mississippi; to Mayor Yarber and Mayor Hewes, the mayors of the cities that represent the namesake of this our newest ship and the host of this commissioning ceremony; to Kate Cochran, thank you so much for the work you've done and the work you continue to do as this ship's sponsor; to Craig Perciavalle, the entire Austal team, thank you for your leadership and craftsmanship in creating this great new ship; and finally, Admiral Antonio, Commander Hawley, the crew of the USS Jackson and all those who made today possible, thank you.

In this job, which, by the way, I have now held longer than any secretary since World War I. By the way, though, the guy in World War I, Josephus Daniels, had an assistant secretary named Franklin Roosevelt. It's unclear whatever happened to him. (Laughter.) But in this job I have traveled 1,160,000 air miles and visited 143 different countries, visiting our Sailors and Marines around the world, but I have to tell you, the best trip I take is a trip where I come home, home to Mississippi. I'm particularly appreciative that the people here don't have an accent – (laughter) – and that they have been so supportive for so many years of our military and of this great country.

We've heard it over and over again today that our Navy and Marine Corps uniquely provide a presence around the globe, around the clock, ensuring stability, deterring adversaries, providing our nation's leaders with options in times of crisis. We're America's away team. Sailors and Marines are out there equally in times of peace and in times of war, not just in the right place at the right time, but in the right place all the time. We get on station faster, we stay there longer, we bring everything we need, and we don't have to ask anyone's permission to do what we need to get done, because our ships, wherever they are, are sovereign U.S. territory.

And that presence is built on four fundamentals: people – our Sailors, our Marines; platforms – the numbers of ships and aircraft that we have; power – how we fuel those platforms; and partnerships – our strong relationships with industry, with our international allies and, most importantly, with the American people. There's no better example of how those fundamentals come together in the naval presence than the commissioning of a U.S. warship.

Here in the heart of the Gulf, we're surrounded by the industries that build our ships – Ingalls, Huntington Ingalls just down the road in Pascagoula; a little bit further along, Austal

USA in Mobile, Alabama, where this modern marvel was manufactured. American craftsmen in Mississippi, Alabama and around this great country have made the USS Jackson possible by making the components that, when combined, come together as a Navy ship. And in doing this, the shipbuilding and repair industry contributes 41,000 jobs, \$1.4 billion in gross product in Mississippi and Alabama alone, and nearly 40 million jobs and \$11 billion to the gross domestic product of this great country.

Those Navy partnerships extend beyond industry to the American people and to their elected representatives. A number of those distinguished leaders are on this stage today, and we all, regardless of party, have one thing in common: We love our nation and we love our Navy, and because we do, we can agree on some absolute things.

First, we're the only nation willing and able to ensure freedom of the seas. And our economy, America's economy and the world's economy, depends on our doing just that every single day. Secondly, in order to prepare it to protect those sea lanes, reassure our allies, deter potential adversaries, we've got to have a fleet that's big enough and capable enough, and that fleet has to be out there forward deployed every single day.

And third, after years of decline, our fleet is growing. We're going to get to the 308 ships that we need to fulfill the strategy that we have by the end of this decade. One of the things I'm proudest of is – in the five years before I took this office, the U.S. Navy had 27 ships under contract. That was not enough to keep our fleet from continuing to shrink, and it was not enough to keep our shipbuilders open. The first five years in this job, we had put 70 ships under contract, with a smaller budget.

Fourth, ships take a long time to build. They're on the seas for decades. The fleet size we have today is based on decisions that were made 10, 15 years ago. And by building our fleet, we're making the decisions today for the Navy that will follow us for 10, 15, 30 years in the future.

And last, and I am preaching to the choir here, shipbuilding is a very unique skill and one that, once lost, is hard or impossible to recover.

Now despite these facts, which I think are beyond discussion, beyond debate, there are some folks out there that have this false narrative that our fleet is declining in size, or that the size of today's fleet will compare to some other time in our history. These arguments discount the fact that ships like this can do a whole lot more than ships have ever been able to do, and they ignore the math that we're adding more fleet – more ships to our fleet than any time in decades.

And these statements, you may get a headline or two, you may get a little personal attention, but they demonstrate a fundamental misconception. And whether that's willful or innocent, we can't afford it. They do a disservice to our Sailors and our Marines when they do that, and most importantly, disservice to this country. These statements embolden our potential adversaries, they undermine the confidence of our allies, and by the way, they're completely wrong.

If you want proof of that, just look behind me, LCS 6, USS Jackson. Its predecessors, LCS 1 through 4, contracted before 2009, average ship construction cost \$548 million. We contracted for USS Jackson for 432 million (dollars). We now have 19 authorized and appropriated ships of this class at an average ship construction cost of \$337 million. We are getting great ships at affordable prices for our taxpayers, thanks to industry and the things that they are doing, thanks to the United States Congress, led by people like Thad Cochran, as we aren't decreasing costs by decreasing any capabilities. In fact, we're adding firepower with our newest LCSes, and we're going to retrofit the others. And we're re-designating these ships from littoral combat ships to fast frigates because they are longer, faster, heavier, more maneuverable than many destroyers that are out there in the world today.

And these results aren't just for LCS. Thanks to the work at Huntington Ingalls in Pascagoula, and thanks to the work at Bath Iron Works in Maine, we're saving \$300 million per ship building our destroyers. It's using good old competition. It's good for industry, it's good for our Navy, it's good for our national security.

In April 2014, we awarded the largest contract in Navy history, \$18 billion, to build 10 Virginia-class submarines. Now, we're getting 10. These submarines cost \$2 billion apiece. If you multiply 10 by two, at least when I was in school, you got 20 billion (dollars). We paid 18 billion (dollars). We got a submarine for free. It's like having one of those punch cards: buy nine subs, get your 10th one free. (Laughter.)

Ultimately, what this is all about is a guarantee for our Sailors, like the crew of the USS Jackson, that we will give them – they will have the tools that they need to do their job. Because this is what they do, forward deploy, the most crucial pillar of our national security strategy, presence. America's newest littoral combat ship will bring our Navy and our nation incredible combat power that can deploy anywhere in the world. This ship will defend the United States and our partners, and her crew of trained and talented Sailors will adapt to meet any challenge – (inaudible) – the horizon, things that we can't even imagine today.

Now, I said this at the christening of Jackson. I get to do a lot of wonderful things in this job. I get to be with the Sailors and Marines every single day. I also get to name every new Navy ship. It may be more than a coincidence, but Jackson now joins USS Mississippi and USNS Choctaw County in our fleet. (Laughter.) This is the first ship ever named for Jackson, Mississippi, and I think that's long overdue.

She'll be a part of our fleet for more than three decades. Sailors not yet born will serve aboard this ship. And there's a chance that for many people around the world, the only Americans they will ever see are Sailors aboard USS Jackson. The story, the spirit, the dedication, the patriotism of Jackson and Mississippi will live on through this ship's voyages around the world. The spirit of her sponsor will live for those decades around the world. And the spirit of the people who sail them will take this ship on the great oceans of the world, will live on for decades.

That voyage starts today as these fine men and women behind you, United States Sailors, take her to sea for the first time as a commissioned United States warship. And they will remain, as their predecessors have for 240 years, Semper Fortis – Always Courageous.

Thank you.