

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
USS Little Rock (LCS 9) Christening Ceremony
Marinette, Wisconsin
Saturday, July 18, 2015

This is a happy day. And I want this to be a happy occasion. But I do want to pause just for a moment, as we did at the beginning of the ceremony. We lost four Marines and one Sailor in Chattanooga, Tennessee. And it underscores just how dangerous the job we ask our Sailors and Marines, our soldiers, our airmen, our Coast Guardsmen to do, regardless of where they are and regardless of whether they're forward-deployed or not. We expect them to go into harm's way.

It is always a risk to call out people, because you're going to leave out somebody. But I'm going to make an exception to that political rule not to do it, because there are some people that I want to give special recognition to, and there are many, many distinguished visitors that I won't get to. But starting on the platform: Mr. Mayor, thank you for being here. Oh, wrong way. Dr. Bonner, thank you. To my colleague, Joe Malloy – Joe pointed out that we've been together for six years. Joe didn't have a single gray hair when I met him. (Laughter.)

Joe's the money guy, and has been since the word go. And he does such an outstanding job, that we keep promoting him. But every time I issue guidance before the budget is developed, and there are certain areas that I say we're not touching these areas. If we've got to find money, and we always do, don't go here. And one of Joe's jobs is to come up with alternatives. We call them in the military, COAs, courses of action. And every time one of those COAs is we could build fewer ships. So the last time we met, Joe had a long presentation. And he started in, and I said, you know, before you even start, we're not taking any ships. So Joe takes a big slug of Maalox – (laughter) – says, aye, aye, and finds the money. Bravo Zulu, Joe.

Congressman, thank you for that eloquent explanation of our Navy and our nation. I've never heard it stated better. Rear Admiral, thank you for spearheading this program. Senator – I met Senator Baldwin just a few weeks after she was sworn in as a brand-new senator. And we talked about LCS. And she has been a true champion, as has the congressman, on that. So thank you for representing your constituents, both of you, and America so well. There's another senator in the audience, Senator Boozman from Arkansas. Thank you so much for being here today.

There are two former governors – actually, there are three former governors here – (laughter) – since I'm one of those too – (laughter) – but Jim Doyle and Jennifer Granholm, Wisconsin and Michigan. And it's in governors' DNA to worry about jobs, to make sure that the people that they represent have good jobs, high-paying jobs, are fully employed, highly skilled. And they did that magnificently while they were governor.

What is unusual, though, is they've been out of office for several years. They are still working for the people of Wisconsin, the people of Michigan, on this program. I have seen them more as former governors as I saw them as sitting governors. And so thank you. Y'all give these two governors a hand. (Applause.)

My predecessor, Donald Winter, who is here today in a staff role, a support role to his wife, the new president of the Society of Sponsors. There is a certain justice in that, and I know that I will find that out when my wife christens the Tripoli, of which she is a sponsor. To the first person I met at the Pentagon as a nominee for this job, Robert Rangel, who helped me understand the job, helped me understand how that interesting place works. And finally, to my fellow Sailors from the first USS Little Rock, particularly Master Chief Mutzabaugh, the very first person I met on Little Rock when he was a young yeoman and I was the most dangerous thing in the U.S. Navy, the junior officer coming on board my first ship. (Laughter.) And it's been great to reconnect with the master chief.

The importance of the Navy is enshrined in our Constitution. Article One says that Congress has the ability to raise an army, but it has the responsibility to maintain a navy. And in that not-so-subtle distinction is the importance of our Navy and our Marine Corps. What we uniquely give this nation is presence, being where it counts, when it counts, being in the right place not just at the right time, but all the time. That presence reassures allies. It deters potential foes. It responds, as the congressman said, to natural disasters. It can do everything from high-end warfare, to hybrid warfare, to the low-intensity conflicts that we're increasingly in today. But it can also help train other navies. It can respond to natural disasters. It can give humanitarian release – relief, disaster assistance.

We get that presence. I'm going to talk a little bit about Navy 101 here, and then I'll get to Little Rock. We get that presence through four other things that start with P – people, platforms, power and partnerships. First is people. And forgive me master chief, but we have the best force we've ever had today. And it's up to us to keep it that way. But we have put them under a lot of stress. We've expected a lot from them. Our operational tempo is incredibly high. We're away from families more and more. And so we're changing the way we manage the force. We're doing things like promote based on merit versus only year group.

We don't have enough women in the Navy and we don't keep enough women in the Navy. So three weeks ago acting under authority given to me, I tripled Navy maternity leave from six weeks to 18 weeks. We're making sure that dual military families, to the extent we can, are co-located or that they don't deploy at the same time. I've extended the childcare hours two hours earlier in the morning, two hours later at night. And every major base has at least one 24-hour childcare facility. We lose too many women. Our force ought to reflect the country that we defend.

And so we're trying to make this easier. We're trying to keep people from making a choice. And Congress, I'm going to ask you for some help. I can do the

maternity leave, but for partners it's only 10 days of leave. And Congress has to change that. Fathers and partners ought to be a part of that child's life also. And for adoptive parents, they only get 21 days. And if it's a dual military family, only one can take that. We ought to do better than that.

Platforms – we're here today because of that. Quantity has a quality all its own. And in 2001 on 9/11, the U.S. Navy had 316 ships. By 2008, we were down to 278 ships. And we were involved in two land wars. There was no reason for this. But in the five years prior to 2009, we only put 27 ships under contract. That wasn't enough to keep these shipyards open and it wasn't enough to keep our fleet from declining. In my first five years, we put 70 ships under contract. And we did with a smaller top line.

And we did it because of places like Marinette, where the cost of the LCS has been cut by more than half thanks to the work we've done together, and thanks to the great shipbuilders here, thanks to the management team from Fincantieri and Lockheed. And I'll use one other platform as a quick example. The Navy last summer signed the biggest contract in our history for 10 Virginia-class submarines, over a \$17 billion contract.

We're getting 10, we paid for nine. It's like having one of those punch cards. (Laughter.) Buy 10 submarines – buy nine submarines, get your 10th one free. (Laughter.) We'll be back at 304 ships by the end of this decade. And we will stay there, because if you miss a year in shipbuilding you never make it up ever. We're living with the fleet size today because of decisions made 15, 20 years ago. The fleet that we have 15 to 20 years from now depends on the decisions we make today.

Third, power, energy. All you have to do is look at what Russia is doing to the Ukraine, what Russia did to Crimea, what Russia's doing to Europe to see how fuel and energy can be used as a weapon. We cannot allow that to be used as a weapon against us. So we are moving toward alternative sources of fuel. By the end of this year, half of our fuel, half of our energy, a gigawatt's worth, on our bases will come from alternative sources. That's five years ahead of schedule. And by 2020, half of all our operational energy at sea for ships like Little Rock will come from alternative sources, so that fuel cannot be used against us as a weapon.

And finally, partnerships. We have three crucial types of partnerships. One is with shipbuilders and industry. And this partnership has allowed us to build Little Rock. It's allowed us to build the amazing Navy that we have today, and the fleet that is coming. And I cannot say enough, as Joe Malloy pointed out, about the shipbuilders here at Marinette, about the ones at Austal, about the ones around the country building the various naval ships, and about those that support them.

The second partnerships is with our international partners. I have now been to 140 separate countries and territories as Secretary. And we're doing something with every one of these. I go primarily to see Sailors and Marines where they are, forward deployed, instead of waiting back at the Pentagon just on the off chance they'll stop by

and see me. (Laughter.) But the other thing is to engage with these international partners.

And finally, it's our partnership with the American people. We're America's away-team. When we're doing our job, we're usually a long, long way from home. And it's ceremonies like this, it's names like Little Rock, it's sponsors like Janee Bonner, that connect the American people to their Navy, to their Marine Corps, to the people – the people protected to the people doing the protecting.

Now, the Little Rock. You've heard the history of Little Rock, built in '45, finished two months before the end of World War II, decommissioned in '49, then brought back into service in the beginning of the Cold War, reconfigured. The aft guns were taken off, the deckhouse was taken off, and nuclear-capable Talos missiles were installed. They also cut out a chunk of the amidships, put this huge antenna up. It did not give the Little Rock a beautiful profile, but it made her a very powerful ship.

She was involved in a whole lot of things – flagship of the 6th Fleet, when to the aid when the USS Liberty was strafed accidentally by the Israelis in the '67 war, was the command ship for that – for us in the '67 Arab-Israel conflict. Off the coast of Santo Domingo to reassure. And today, CLG-4, CG-92, the first Little Rock, lies in anchor in the harbor of Buffalo, New York. I'm leaving here to go to Buffalo. And we are, as you've heard, live streaming this primarily to Little Rock, to Austal, but also to Buffalo, for those Sailors that sailed on the first USS Little Rock.

Little Rock has had some amazing people who served on it. James E. Williams, the most decorated enlisted Sailor in U.S. Navy history, served on Little Rock, Metal of Honor recipient, Navy Cross, two Silver Stars. Carl Mundy, future commandant of the Marine Corps, served aboard Little Rock. Captain Frank Caldwell, United States Marine Corps, Navy Cross recipient at Iwo Jima, served aboard Little Rock. And a very scruffy, terrible beard, Lieutenant JG showed up in 1970 and joined the crew of the USS Little Rock. Whatever success I have had in life, I owe so much of it to what I learned on that ship and from people like Master Chief Mutzabaugh.

We are extremely fortunate to have as the sponsor of Little Rock – I mean, I've got the coolest job in the world. I get to name Navy ships – and naming the second USS Little Rock because I served on the first one is an absolute coincidence, I can assure you of that. (Laughter.) But I also get to name sponsors. And I have to tell you, it is no accident that the sponsor of a Freedom-class variant built in Marinette is a native of Mobile, where we build the other variant. This is two variants, but one program. Janee Bonner ties those two great communities, two great shipbuilders together.

This LCS program, I think it's fair to say, got off to a bumpy start. But, as has been said before, once we got the ships in the water and you see what they do – Fort Worth, the Freedom, the Independence at RIMPAC last year – those questions have begun to subside. Janee Bonner, sponsor of the Little Rock, native of Mobile, graduate of Rhodes College in Memphis, lived in D.C. for 12 years and then returned home and

has been a force – an absolute force in her community, regardless of whether that was Washington or Mobile or now Tuscaloosa.

Too many civic responsibilities to mention – president of the Junior League and on the board of the Episcopal school there, on the board of the United Way, and on, and on, and on. Her husband, Jo, I think it is fair to say that the odds of LCS surviving would not have been as great without Jo Bonner. And he's not here today because he's taking their younger son, or their younger child, Robins, on a college visit today. He's a senior in high school. And I know how important that is. The only thing, Jo, you're taking him to the Air Force Academy today. (Laughter.) Really? (Laughter.) We've got a school right now the road. (Laughter.) So I know people there. Bring him to Annapolis next.

Janee Bonner, civic leader, a wonderful sponsor, will infuse the new USS Little Rock with her spirit, her determination, her graciousness. From the Navy, Semper Fortis, Always Courageous. From the Marines, Semper Fidelis, Always Faithful. Thank you.