

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Naming Celebration for USS Illinois
Chicago, Illinois
Friday, 22 June 2012

Governor Quinn, ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for being here today. I'm so pleased to be with you to announce that the nuclear-powered attack submarine will be named USS Illinois.

The Navy Pier is an absolutely appropriate place to have this ceremony. It was built in 1927 and dedicated to the Navy, to the Sailors who served in World War I, and it played a critical role in training more than 15,000 Navy pilots during World War II.

The name "Illinois" has been a great part of our naval history. The first ship named for this state was a battleship, part of President Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet that circumnavigated the world in 1907, introducing America as a global power. The Great White Fleet had the most advanced ships of its time, battleships made from steel and powered by steam, and they represented the greatness and innovation of American ingenuity and industry.

The Navy has a long history of transforming our fleet, including how the fleet has gone from wind to coal to oil and then pioneering nuclear. The Navy leads our nation in pioneering new energy sources, and we will continue to do that. Next month, during the largest naval exercise in the world, the Rim of the Pacific, we will demonstrate the Great Green Fleet, a carrier strike group conducting exercises using a 50/50 blend of domestically produced biofuels and aviation gas and diesel. And now that carrier strike group, the Great Green Fleet, in honor of the legacy created by the Great White Fleet, welcomes the Illinois and other ships. The Navy is once more leading in energy transformation.

There has not been a USS Illinois in our fleet since that first battleship was decommissioned almost a century ago, and I am so glad to be able to correct that here today.

Construction began last March on SSN 786, the new Illinois, and she is scheduled to arrive in the fleet in 2015.

She will be built to excel in traditional areas of submarine warfare like warfare against submarines, surface targets or doing land attack missions. She will also be built to do very nontraditional submarine duties, things like delivering our SEALs to their missions and collecting intelligence from far-off shores. During her service in the fleet, Illinois may sail the waters of the Western Pacific or the Northern Atlantic, including the Arctic ice, doing incredibly varied and incredibly valuable work. It's being built in Groton, Connecticut, by Electric Boat.

These attack submarines are a wonderful success story. They are coming in ahead of schedule and under budget. Earlier this month we commissioned another attack submarine, the wonderfully named USS Mississippi, in Pascagoula, my home state. That submarine set a record

for the fastest delivery. It was over a year early coming into the fleet. It's a model for our shipbuilding programs.

September 11th, 2001 our fleet stood at 316 ships, and we had over 377,000 Sailors. Eight years later, when I took office, our fleet had dropped to 283 ships, and we had 49,000 fewer Sailors. At the same time, many of our shipbuilding programs were – and this is a technical term – a mess. Ships were being designed while they were being built, and costs were a lot of times out of control. But in the last three years, we've stabilized our shipbuilding programs, and we've stabilized our fleet, and we will grow our fleet to 300 ships by 2019. Since December of 2010, we have placed 40 ships under contract. That is compared to three ships the years before, in 2008. We've done this by using better management tools like increased competition and fixed-price contracts. It's a significant accomplishment for the Navy, but a more significant accomplishment for America.

This administration has made it a priority to rebuild our fleet, and today's ceremony is part of that successful effort. By doing this, we keep America safe, we keep the Navy strong, and we keep the economy strong by keeping high-skilled jobs at home.

The new USS Illinois will be in the fleet for more than three decades. There are Sailors right now in the Great Lakes, about an hour from here, who are training – who will sail the Illinois. There are also Sailors who will sail on Illinois who are not yet born.

The men and women who will serve aboard this submarine may well be the only part of America that many people around the world will ever see. In fact, most Americans have too few opportunities to see what our Navy does. One great way to remedy this is by the close connection between a state and the ship that bears her name. This ship, this USS Illinois, honors the citizens of Illinois, who have so strongly supported our military, and it honors Illinois veterans, some of whom we have with us today, who represent this state so well in so many ways.

Two hundred and three citizens of Illinois have been awarded the Medal of Honor. One of them, during World War II, was Navy Corpsman Fred Lester, who was born just outside Chicago in Downers Grove. Petty Officer Lester was supporting the Marines in Okinawa in 1945, and he saw a Marine exposed to heavy enemy gunfire, and he crawled out and pulled him to safety, and he kept doing that even though his own body was hit several times by enemy fire. He was too wounded to administer aid when he managed to bring the Marine back to safety, but he instructed two other people on how to give aid, and they saved the Marine's life. Petty Officer Lester knew he was dying, but he refused treatment and directed his men to treat other wounded Marines before he passed away. That's the kind of veteran, that's the kind of citizen, that's the kind of character that lives in this state. That's the kind of character that will live aboard the USS Illinois.

One other way to keep the close connection between the people of Illinois and this submarine is through her sponsor, the First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama. She has worked tirelessly for service members and their families. She is going to bring that same dedication and caring to the Illinois.

So thank you for being here today. Thank you for being a part of the life of this ship and a part of our Navy's history. Thank you for joining us in the celebration of this great state, whose name will soon be forged in steel and sent to sea to protect America and all of us.

In the words of the Navy motto, *semper fortis* – forever courageous.

Thank you very much.