

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
USS Trenton Christening
Mobile, Alabama
Saturday, January 10, 2015

This is just about a perfect day for me. I get to come back close to home, to the only part of the country that doesn't have an accent – (laughter) – although the weather's a little odd. I get to be involved in bringing another ship to the fleet – and I'm going to talk about fleet size and the need for these ships. I get to be with Austal and Austal employees.

And speaking of that, the last time I was here, I said, you know, I come so much – they kept giving these badges that said “visitor.” I said, you know, I'm just about – I just about work here, I've been here so much. (Laughter.) So I've got an employee badge now. (Laughter, applause.) I'll be looking for my 401(k). (Laughter.) And I get to be with a wonderful person, Ginny Kamsky.

And I want to thank all of y'all for being here this morning. I did have a little fun with our friends from New Jersey and New York when the color guard from Gautier, Mississippi came up. And I want to thank them and I want to thank our high school band here for doing such a great job with – I asked them how to spell Gautier. (Laughter.) And when they came up sort of empty, I said it's spelled exactly the way it's pronounced: G-A-U-T-I-E-R, Gautier. (Laughter.)

So thank you for this day. And first I want to talk about our sponsor. Being a sponsor is a tradition that goes back a couple of centuries in our Navy. And the sponsor is one of the – is an honorary member of the original crew of the ship, one of the plank owners, as we call it in the Navy. Sponsors have a special relationship with the ship. And they are the ones that bridge the relationship between the citizens of Trenton in New Jersey, the people of America, with this ship and with the mariners who sail her.

And you've heard that a ship's sponsor infuses her personality into the ship. I'll tell you what, if that is the case – and I do believe it is – then this ship will have the enthusiasm, the generosity of spirit and the amazing intellect of its sponsor. And if it does, it will be one outstanding ship in the United States Navy.

And I want to say a little bit about the other attendant, Michael, an amazing young man. We've got Barbara Pilling here, who is head of the Society of Sponsors. And she does a wonderful job, as does the society. And I have made her job more difficult in my time as secretary. The first christening of a high-speed vessel was Choctaw County, which – and I do get to name all Navy ships – but it's just coincidentally the county I grew up in. (Laughter.) And while it's traditional to name one sponsor, I named 29 for that, for the women in my high school graduating class. And Barbara took that amazingly.

And this time, Ginny chose instead of a maid of honor, a male of honor. And you know, if you look back in history, until about 200 years ago, all sponsors were men, and then it changed. And now all sponsors are traditionally women. And they have maids of honor who are traditionally women. But you know, this is a new kind of ship. This is a new kind of Navy. I think it's altogether fitting that we have a different kind of model here. And, Michael you're going to be terrific in this role.

As long as we're talking about gender – or I'm talking about gender – I'm so happy to see Captain Orsini, female captain of this ship. I've been talking a lot about the fact we just don't have enough women in the Navy, but we're working hard to do that. But I will say what I said when we voted Michelle Howard the vice chief of Naval Operations, the first woman to hold that spot. We didn't pick her on gender. We picked the best person available. And that's what's happening in this case as well.

So I want to thank all these – our two mayors – our three mayors that are here, our representatives of the Alabama congressional delegation and the State of Alabama for making today possible.

The United States Navy and the Marine Corps are so closely tied with this great nation that our founders put it in the Constitution. Congress is mandated in the Constitution to maintain a Navy. They're told to raise an Army, but maintain a Navy. Maritime forces, those that operate from the sea, are incredibly flexible and responsive. They provide our country's leaders with every option needed for any crisis. Coming from the sea, we get there sooner, we can stay as long as we need to, we bring everything that we need with us, and we don't need anybody's permission to be there.

The best example I could give of this is this week I got the brief from the George H.W. Bush Strike Group. They were in the northern Arabian Sea doing combat air over Afghanistan when ISIL started marauding across Iraq. Within 30 hours, they had gotten from there to the northern Arabian Gulf and launched their response. For 54 days – 54 days – they were the only American asset that could launch strikes into Iraq. We don't need anybody's permission. We come from the sea.

We call that presence. Presence is what the Navy and Marine Corps uniquely give to America. It gives our country the ability to act in defense of our interests. It reassures our allies and causes our potential adversaries to pause. Getting there and staying there requires enough of the right platforms – our ships, our aircraft, our submarines, critical equipment our Sailors and Marines need to do their job. That makes our shipbuilding and our shipbuilders central to the notion of protecting America and protecting everything we stand for.

This new ship, as you've heard, is a marvel of technological innovation, American innovation, the strength of our manufacturing system, as is this incredible shipyard and the shipbuilders who built it. You've heard a lot today about - we're in production of a boat, the Littoral Combat Ship and the High Speed Vessel. The costs going down for every one of these ships, and they're launching on schedule. And thousands of American

craftsmen from around the country are working on the components for this ship and its system. And that's a partnership – a partnership between our uniformed men and women, our Navy civilians, industry and the American people. And that partnership is one of the greatest strengths of our system.

I love building ships. I'm going to give you some numbers. On 9/11/2001, the U.S. Navy stood at 316 ships. By 2008, after one of the great military buildups in our history, we were down to 278 ships. In the five years before I became the secretary, we put 27 ships under contract. That wasn't enough to stop the slide of the size of the fleet and it wasn't enough to keep the industrial base.

But in the first five years I've been the secretary, we have put 70 ships under contract. With a smaller top line budget. And I've said that so many times I've started taking some hits saying, well, you're not buying enough aircraft. Well, we're buying 50 percent more aircraft in the last five years than we did in the five years preceding that, because quantity becomes a quality all its own. You have to have a presence.

That partnership, that ability to build the fleet that we need is on display here every single day. And it's going enable us to build the 52 Littoral Combat Ships and 11 High Speed Vessels. And I am very glad that the Congress thought this program was going so well that they added a High Speed Vessel in this year's appropriations bill.

One of the things that it shows is that acquisition excellence isn't just a phrase that gets used in Washington. We're rebuilding the fleet, and everybody benefits. America is stronger. Our fleet is strong. And Alabama and the Gulf Coast economy is more vibrant.

You've heard about how we've had three ships named Trenton. And Trenton has an incredibly important place in our nation's history. In the American Revolution – you've heard this before – Christmas Day, this was 1776. Washington brought the remnants of his army across the Delaware in a blinding snowstorm and at dawn attacked a British garrison at Trenton. Won a tremendous victory, but it was a lot more than just a tactical success for that day. It revived the cause of independence. In the midst of that long war, when so many things could go wrong, it brought back the faith of the American people in themselves, in justice, and in the cause of freedom. And it was, as any Sailor or Marine will point out, an amphibious operation.

The name Trenton, again, has had a long association with our Navy. The fourth Trenton. And it represents so much.

It represents the people of Trenton and the people of New Jersey and the importance of the cities all along the Delaware River. It represents American workers who have been the backbone of the arsenal of democracy since Franklin Roosevelt coined that term over 70 years ago. It represents the American spirit of hard work and patriotism and perseverance. It represents American technological superiority and the edge that, even with that technology, that our people – from the people who build this ship to the people who will crew this ship or the people on whose behalf this ship sails – demonstrate.

The Trenton will carry these values and this spirit forever. The Trenton will carry the spirit of Ginny Kamsky. It is absolutely tailored to the missions of our 21st -century operations. You've heard about some of the things she can do – fast, agile, shallow draft, allow us to work in a lot of different ways. And it will sail for decades. And because of its unique characteristics, a lot of the places that Trenton will go, the people aboard Trenton – whether it's the crew or the people that are sailing with them – will be the only Americans that people in these foreign lands will ever see. And maybe the name and the story and the spirit of Trenton, can be known around the world.

So now it's time to christen this incredible new ship, so its crew can take it to sea and defend our nation, just as our Navy and our civilian mariners have done for 239 years.

So from the Navy, *semper fortis*, forever courageous. From the Marines, *semper fidelis*, forever faithful.

Thank you all very much.