

Remarks of the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
Columbia University NROTC Proclamation  
USS IWO JIMA  
New York City, NY  
Thursday, 26 May, 2011

Good morning and welcome to the USS IWO JIMA. I would ask you to observe a moment of silence for the Marine we lost last night. He was a member of the 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit embarked here on IWO JIMA. Thank you.

It is always great to stand on the deck of a Navy ship, and it's particularly great to stand on the deck of a Navy ship in New York harbor. The last time I was privileged to do that was for the commissioning of USS NEW YORK very close to here, in fact, this same pier, in November 2009.

That was a memorable day for Navy and for the City of New York, because USS NEW YORK contained 7 ½ tons of steel from the World Trade Center, and we were able to honor the memory of the nearly 3000 men and women who perished in those terrorist attacks on 9/11, we were able recognize the enduring importance of this city and this state to the Navy and Marine Corps, and we were able to celebrate the service of tens of thousands of New Yorkers who wear the uniform of our country.

And in way we've come full circle, because I, like everybody here, sat and watched with an amazing degree of pride as we heard the President announce, almost a month ago, that the most wanted terrorist on Earth had been brought to justice by the United States military. And as important as that was, and as brave and good as those warriors were who carried out the mission, one point I want to make, is that everybody who wears the uniform of America, everybody who sails on IWO JIMA, the Marines

who are embarked on IWO JIMA, and all the ships across the Navy, have that same level of skill, that same level of dedication, and they do dangerous jobs, and they do them incredibly well on behalf of all of us.

And while that day in November 2009 was memorable, today will be another memorable day, and another historic occasion. I can't think of a better place to do this than the flight deck of IWO JIMA, named after one of the great Marine battles in history, or a better time than Fleet Week to formally announce the re-establishment of the Naval Reserve Officer Training Unit to Columbia University after an absence of 40 years.

I am particularly happy to be joined here today by the President of Columbia University, President Lee Bollinger, who along with my Assistant Secretary for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Juan Garcia, have both been working very hard and been the driving force behind bringing NROTC back to Columbia.

This is also a very personal day for me. Forty-two years ago, I was commissioned into the United States Navy at Columbia University. I was 20 years old. I had just finished my midshipman summer cruise. I had flown back into McGuire Air Force Base and got orders there to come to New York City, contact the Commanding Officer of the NROTC unit at Columbia and be commissioned. And I'm very proud to be a Columbia Naval Officer.

I'd also like to recognize those members of the Columbia faculty and staff who are here today, and who also worked incredibly hard to make today happen, as well as Provost Joseph Hoffman from SUNY Maritime and his Naval ROTC staff, who through their campus will offer a lot of the classes which Columbia midshipmen will take.

I said the formal re-establishment because in a very real way, Columbia has always been a strong partner for the United States military. The navy blue of the Navy and the lighter blue of Columbia have always been together supporting the Navy and the other branches of our military. Dozens of veterans and dozens active-duty members are at Columbia every year, and Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs is one of the most highly recognized leaders in international security policy in the country.

Renewal of this formal relationship though will serve to bring a whole lot of new and talented officers into the Navy and Marine Corps every year, and the presence of NROTC will enrich and strengthen both services and the educational experience of all students. In order to best serve our nation, our military has to strive to be reflective of the nation it serves, and it does not serve our country well if any part of society does not share in the honor of its defense.

The 159 universities and colleges which have NROTC units today produce an extremely talented group of officers from a variety of regions, a variety of perspectives and a variety of backgrounds. But for decades, 40 years in this case, the lack of a formal military presence on too many of our country's campuses resulted in so many undergraduates leaving college having little or no contact with anyone who serves.

These relationships matter. Our nation's universities produce the country's future political, economic, scientific, and business leaders. The education of leaders is about exposure to new and different ideas, to varied viewpoints, and to the full range of possibilities open to the graduates of that university. At a time when only 1 percent of this country serves in uniform, interaction with officer candidates may be the only window into military life that many graduates will ever have.

So I am very happy to be here to mark the return of NROTC to a great university, to Columbia. It is good for Columbia, it is good for the military, and it is good for our country. Together, we have made a decision to enrich the experience open to Columbia's students, make our military better, and our nation stronger. Because with exposure comes understanding, and with understanding comes strength. Thank you very much.