

The Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
USS ILLINOIS Keel Laying
2 June 2014

First Lady, Michelle Obama, Distinguished Guests, Shipbuilders, and Friends, the Navy has many traditions, most show the continuity of service of Sailors and ships that, in our case, date to the dawn of our nation and, in a larger sense, date to antiquity.

This keel-laying is one of those traditions in the life of a ship. When the people's elected representatives authorize a new ship and appropriate funds for her construction, the ship is named, a sponsor chosen, its keel laid, she is christened and finally, she joins the fleet upon her commissioning. Each of these steps marks a significant event as a ship, and in today's case a submarine, takes shape and readies for decades of patrolling the earth's oceans in defense of our nation.

America and its Navy are so closely joined that our Founders enshrined that relationship in the Constitution, requiring Congress "to provide and maintain a Navy." Now, as then, our Navy uniquely provides presence around the globe. We are in the right place, not just at the right time, but all the time. And we provide that presence, no less in peacetime than we do in war. Our Navy gives the President options whenever a crisis occurs. Because we come from the sea, we do not take up an inch of anyone else's sovereign territory, we carry everything we need and we can stay for a very long time.

The vessel whose keel we lay today will be the most advanced ship in the world; its technology absolutely unmatched. American technological innovation and manufacturing skill have always been powerful American advantages. They are represented in the future USS Illinois by the more than 1000 shipyard professionals working directly on it with so many more from around our country providing parts and systems. Their dedication, their expertise, their incredibly hard work will fashion from steel and wire and electronics the premier platform that will be the Illinois.

Now I'm going to repeat some things that you've already heard about our shipbuilding program and about our submarine program in particular. But I have been told that repetition is the vital part of good communication. As you have heard, and I am going to repeat this, less than a month ago, we announced the Navy's largest ever contract, \$17.6 billion, to build ten more of these amazing submarines. I want to thank the Members of Congress who we have here today for making this possible and – please, clap. And I want to thank industry, represented by Electric Boat and Huntington Ingalls, for their indispensable contribution. Because of the partnership and the creativity among Congress, industry and Navy, we will save more than \$2 billion on these submarines, essentially getting 10 for the price of nine. It's like one of those punch cards you get going to the movies. I've paid for nine, now I get my 10th for free.

And it's not just submarines. Again, I'm repeating, but in the five years before this administration took office, an administration headed, I note, by someone close to a member of the platform party, the Navy put 27 ships under contract. In the five years since, we have put 70 ships under contract. The decline in the size of the fleet has been arrested and we will return to a

fleet of more than 300 ships by the end of this decade. Because of the effort put into this by everyone - by Congress, by Navy, by industry, by the American people - the United States is safer because our fleet is stronger.

A naval ship takes its character and its spirit from its name, its sponsor and those who sail aboard her. Although far from the open ocean, Illinois and our sea services have very close ties. As Admiral Richardson said, the battleship Illinois served valiantly one hundred years ago in World War I. Today, every Sailor receives their initial training in boot camp at Great Lakes, Illinois. Those Sailors – all of them – mark our other, and most important, advantage. The skill, the dedication and the courage of our people are our true edge. That’s our true advantage.

Now I’m an incredibly fortunate. I get to deal with these Sailors and Marines every day. I get to deal with shipyard workers who build these amazing platforms on a routine basis. And I get to choose the name and the sponsor of every ship the Navy builds.

The sponsor of USS Illinois is a proud daughter of the Prairie State. She has, by her actions, immeasurably helped our Sailors and their families and all our military families of all services. Her life has been one of dedication to community at every level. She has brought that passion and her formidable skills to the military community. Her Joining Forces campaign to support service members’ families with employment and education programs and wellness initiatives has had a huge, positive, permanent impact.

She will be the tangible connection between the people of Illinois, the people of the United States and their values to this ship. She will imbue the Illinois with her compassionate and indefatigable spirit and will serve as an inspiration to all those who sail aboard USS Illinois.

Michelle Obama, first Lady of the United States, and sponsor of the USS Illinois.