

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
National Press Club Luncheon
Introduction and Moderator: John Hughes
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JOHN HUGHES: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon and welcome. My name is John Hughes. I am an editor for Bloomberg First Word – that’s our breaking news desk here in Washington – and I am the 108th president of the National Press Club.

The Club is the world’s leading professional organization for journalists. We’re committed to our profession’s future through programs just like this, and we fight for a free press worldwide. For more information, visit our website – that’s press.org. And if you’d like to learn about our nonprofit arm, check out the website press.org/institute. That’s press.org/institute.

On behalf of members worldwide, I want to welcome all of you. And I’d also like to welcome our C-SPAN and public radio audiences. You can follow the action on Twitter today. Use the hashtag #NPCLunch. Remember, the public attends our lunches, so applause is not evidence of a lack of journalistic objectivity. (Laughter.)

After our guest’s speech, we will have a question-and-answer session. I will ask as many questions as time permits.

Our head table includes guests of our speaker and working journalists who are members of the National Press Club. Let me introduce them to you now. I’d ask each person to stand briefly as their names are announced.

From the audience’s right, Ken Delacki, a Navy Vietnam veteran; Hayley Tsukamaya, technology reporter for The Washington Post; Andrea Shalal, military and defense correspondent for Reuters; Thomas Oppel, chief of staff to the secretary of the Navy and a guest of our speaker; Max Lederer, publisher of Stars and Stripes; Senator John Warner, a former Navy secretary and guest of the speaker; Donna – (applause) – Donna Leinwand Leger, breaking news reporter for USA Today, vice chair of the Speakers Committee, and a former National Press Club president.

Skipping over our speaker for a moment, Captain Kevin Wensing, retired, a Navy veteran, former special assistant to the Navy secretary, and the Press Club member who arranged today’s luncheon. Thank you, Kevin. Jen Judson, defense reporter at Politico and co-chair of the National Press Club’s Young Members Committee; Vago Muradian, editor of Defense News and host of the weekly program Defense News on WABC-TV; Tony Capaccio, defense reporter at Bloomberg News; John Fales, a.k.a. Sgt. Shaft, a freelance writer, a U.S. Marine Corps Vietnam combat veteran, and president of the Blind American Veterans Foundation. (Cheers, applause.)

Recent Pentagon developments show that Navy Secretary Ray Mabus sees change ahead for the military branch that he oversees. Last week, Mabus directed his staff to create an advisory council to, quote, “assist, accelerate and enable innovation to thrive.” The week before, he announced plans to appoint a new deputy assistant secretary to focus solely on unmanned systems such as aerial drones and robotic submarines.

Since assuming his post in May 2009, Mabus, a former governor of Mississippi, hasn’t hesitated to try new things. He’s got a page on Facebook. (Laughter.) He has named ships for former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and labor leader Cesar Chavez. He’s made cameo appearances on the Navy crime drama “NCIS.” (Laughter.)

Despite these new things, there are other things for the Navy that remain constant. U.S. vessels are currently deployed to hotspots all over the world. Recently the Navy repositioned a U.S. Carrier Battle Group in the Arabian Sea as the security situation in Yemen deteriorated. In recent days, all eyes have been on the Strait of Hormuz, as a cargo ship flying the flag of the Marshall Islands was seized by Iranian naval forces. We look forward to hearing how Secretary Mabus plans to handle these many challenges, all the while crafting a Navy of the future.

Please join me in giving a warm National Press Club welcome to Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus. (Applause.)

SECRETARY RAY MABUS: John, thank you so much. And thank all of you for having me here and for being here.

I’m only going to call out one person before I start, and that’s my esteemed predecessor, Senator John Warner. (Applause.) Every secretary of the Navy aspires to be John Warner, and I just want to point out that this is John Warner the person, not John Warner the submarine. (Laughter.) But John Warner the submarine will be commissioned in August of this year and will spend the next 40 years patrolling the waters of this Earth, protecting the country that Senator Warner, Secretary Warner, has served so well and so long. (Applause.)

What the Navy and Marine Corps uniquely give this country is presence – being in the right place, not just at the right time but all the time. We get places quicker. We can stay as long as we need to. We take whatever we need with us. And we don’t have to ask anyone’s permission to get the job done.

And part of that presence has ensured the global economic system for the past 70 years. Keeping the sea lanes open for everybody involved in peaceful trade has been the reason that the world’s economy is working as well as it does, because 90 percent of all trade goes by sea, and 95 percent of all voice communications and all data go under the sea. So the 21st century very definitely is a maritime century.

A chief of navy from Asia told me one time that the difference between soldiers and sailors is that soldiers look down at maps, they see lines, they see boundaries, they

see obstacles; sailors look up over the horizon, they see no lines, they see no boundaries, they only want to see what comes next, what comes over that horizon.

And our Founding Fathers understood the necessity for a great Navy. In the Constitution, in Article I, it says that Congress has the authority to raise an Army, but it has the responsibility to maintain a Navy. And in that not-so-subtle distinction lies the importance of the United States Navy and Marine Corps.

We deploy equally in times of peace and in times of war. We have never been a garrison force and never will be. There are no permanent homecomings for sailors and Marines.

We've also been at the forefront of technological and other innovations for as long as we've had a Navy. And I'm going to talk about energy in a little while, but we led the country. We moved from sail to coal, from coal to oil. We pioneered the use of nuclear.

And the way that I have tried to organize my thinking, and the way that the Navy approaches this presence and the responsibilities that we have to this country, are four Ps: people, our sailors and Marines; platforms, our ships and our aircraft; power, the fuel for those platforms; and partnerships – partnerships with the American people, partnerships with industry, partnerships with our allies around the world.

I'm going to start out with platforms. You know, there's a lot of conversation and has been for a little while about the size of our fleet. And if you listen to some folks, this administration is just gutting the Navy: "yeah, we're heading downhill and we're heading downhill fast." Nothing could be further from the truth. And then there's this arbitrary ship counting, the way we count ships.

So let me give you a couple of facts here. On 9/11/2001, the U.S. Navy had 316 ships. By 2008, after one of the great military buildups in our history, we were down to 278 ships and shrinking. In the five years before I became secretary, the Navy put 27 ships under contract. That was not enough to keep the size – the size of the fleet from going down. It was also not enough to keep our shipyards active and in business. In the first five years I've had this job, we have put 70 ships under contract. And we've done it with a smaller top line.

We're going to get back to more than 300 ships by the end of this decade, 304 to be exact. And the reason I talk about these numbers is that Congress last year, in the National Defense Authorization Act, said we couldn't count patrol craft forward deployed in the Arabian Gulf as part of the battle fleet. Now, it was done because it didn't match the political narrative that some people were going into – that the Navy was getting smaller, that we were shrinking. But I'll tell you, those sailors onboard those patrol craft think they're in the battle fleet. Our combat commanders who request them think they're in the battle fleet. We think they're in the battle fleet. And I guarantee you

the Iranians think they're in the battle fleet. (Laughter.) And right now there are three of those around the – around the Maersk.

And I'd just like to take politics out of this a little while. Let us count the ships that the – that the combat commanders ask for. Let us get a real count on how many ships there are. And let's recognize that the decisions that were made 10, 12 years ago are what we're dealing with today, because when you build ships they take a long time and they're very expensive. If you miss a year building a ship, you never make it up – never. And so we're dealing today – the size of our fleet today was decided 10 or 12 years ago. The size of our fleet five years from now, 10 years from now, 15 years from now, 20 years from now is being decided with the decisions we make today.

And quantity has a quality all its own. We've got to have enough of those big gray hulls on the horizon, reassuring our allies, deterring potential adversaries, and keeping those sea lanes open – keeping the world economy moving – because for the first time in history there's a dominant naval power, and has been for the last 70 years, that's kept the sea lanes open, not just for ships flying our own flag or those of our allies but for everybody.

So I'll give you a couple of quick examples on shipbuilding. I mean, we got – we went from 27 ships in five years to 70 ships in five years just by doing some very simple, very basic business things: firm fixed-price contracts, competition, mature technology, stable designs.

The couple of examples I'll use, the DDG-51s. They're built in two shipyards: Bath, Maine and Pascagoula, Mississippi. We were building two a year. We want both those shipyards to stay in business for all sorts of reasons, competition being right up there at the top, but there really wasn't any competition because each one was getting one every year and the prices kept going up. So in 2012 we bid out three, and we said the low bid gets the third ship – and oh, by the way, the difference in the high bid and the low bid comes out of the high bidder's profit. One shipyard just crushed the other in that competition. And the next year we bid out nine – low bid gets five, high bid gets four, with an option we could swing between the two – and once again, the high bidder's – the difference in the high bid and the low bid came out of the high bidder's profit. Funny thing, the other shipyard won in a pretty dramatic fashion. We're saving about \$300 million a year per ship in these things.

The second one is the Virginia-class submarine, of which the John Warner will be the newest one. We signed the largest Navy contract in history last summer to buy 10 of these submarines. We paid for nine. We got a free submarine. (Laughter.) It was like having one of those punch cards. (Laughter.) I bought nine, give me my – (laughter) – give me my 10th one free.

And as John said, I just announced that we're going to have a deputy assistant secretary of the Navy focusing on unmanned, only unmanned. We're also going to have a new end code, N-99, on Navy staff, focusing on unmanned, because unmanned is the

future. And we're the only service – the only one – that does it above the sea, on the sea and under the sea. And we needed a champion. We needed somebody who – because the technology cuts across all sorts of platforms and in all sorts of realms, and we were simply running too many one-off programs doing this.

And you may have seen some pictures of the X-47B just successfully showed it could get refueled. That's our unmanned carrier aircraft, just got refueled in the air. Nobody's flying that thing. I mean, it's programmed to go find the carrier, land, take off, go find the tanker. And as I said, that's the future. That's the future of warfare, whether underwater, surface or in the air.

People. That's the bedrock of our success. We've got the best force we've ever had, but we put them, and we have put them for years now, under a lot of stress. I'm going to be making some announcements in May, the 12th and 13th, about some of the things we're trying to do to help the force and to maintain the quality that we've got, and to keep some people. Things like career intermission programs that lets people go out of the Navy for a while, come back in, but compete as though they never left so they're not competing against people that have been there the whole time for promotions. Things like promoting based on merit, not on your group as much. We don't – we don't have enough women in either the Navy or the Marine Corps, and we've got to do a better job of recruiting and we've got to do a better job of retaining those women.

And along those lines – and this is sort of a – seems like a small area, but I do think it's symbolically important – I was at the very first Army-Navy in – my very first Army-Navy as secretary in 2009. By the way, Navy won, but that's – (laughter) – that's been true for the last 13 years, so that's – (laughter) – that doesn't make it – make it special or anything. (Laughter.) But I watched as the Corps of Cadets and the Brigade of Midshipmen marched out, and that's one of the most moving things you could possibly see. Corps of Cadets came out and everybody was dressed exactly the same, same uniforms. Midshipmen came out, women were wearing a different uniform and a different cover. And so we're in the midst of changing it. We have changed it at the Academy and we're in the midst of changing the uniforms across the Navy and the Marine Corps, so that when you look out you see American sailors and Marines, not particularly female sailors or male sailors. If we ask any other group to wear a different uniform, imagine the trouble we'd be in. And this is symbolic in terms of not segregating women, of making sure that they are substantively and symbolically the heart of our force power.

DOD is the largest single user of fossil fuels on Earth. We're a little bit more than a third of that. In 2009 I set energy goals for the Navy, the biggest one of which is by no later than 2020 at least half of all our power, both ashore and afloat, will come from non-fossil-fuel sources. I did this for one reason: to make us better warfighters. It's got some great side effects in terms of being better stewards of the environment, but we're better fighters because of this.

We're going to be there on our shore bases this year. We're going to be five years early. So by the end of '15, half of all Naval energy on our shore bases – and we're a seagoing service, but we own 3 ½ million acres of land and have 117,000 buildings. So we will be purchasing a gigawatt of renewable energy by the end of this year, and we don't particularly care what the source is. We're doing wind. We're doing solar. We're doing geothermal, hydrothermal, landfill, almost anything.

But energy is a vulnerability. It's a vulnerability for two reasons. One is supply. We were dependent too much on countries that may not wish us the best. And second is price. And the price of oil and gas have gone down dramatically recently, but in the first few years I was secretary we got presented with several billion dollars of unbudgeted fuel-price increases just because of the volatility in that market. And while it's down right now, you track the long-term flow of oil and gas and the price is only going in one direction with movement around that line.

Next year, we're going to deploy the Great Green Fleet. It's going to be a carrier strike group. We've demonstrated it. We demonstrated it in 2012, carrier strike group. The carrier's going to be sailing on nuclear. Every type of aircraft and every ship – other ship in the strike group will be 50/50 blends of biofuels and avgas and marine diesel. We've certified every single ship and every single aircraft.

I was ambassador to Saudi Arabia in the '90s, and there was a great quote there from the oil minister, you know, of the '80s, Zaki Yamani, who said that the Stone Age didn't end because we ran out of stones. It didn't. It ended because we invented something better. And the Navy has always been on the cutting edge of energy and energy transformation. And there have always been naysayers, they've always been wrong, and they're wrong this time, too.

And finally, partnerships. We're America's away team. When the Navy and Marine Corps are doing their job, we're usually a long, long way from home, and so the American people don't get to see how hard the job is and how good the sailors and Marines are that do it. So part of our partnership is with the American people in reconnecting them to that service and making sure that the service reflects the people being defended. And it's one of the reasons that I worked hard and we brought NROTC back to Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Columbia. We've also added Naval ROTC at Rutgers and Arizona State, the two most diverse campuses in this country.

There is a danger with an all-volunteer force that that force will get separated from the people that it defends. And that's one of the reasons we've got to do these partnership things, and it's one of the reasons I name ships what I do. I've also named a ship the Medgar Evers, for the assassinated civil rights hero. I've named them for Medal of Honor recipients, for Senator Dan Inouye, because I think we ought to name ships that reflect our values; and that when those ships are around the world and people – it's the only Americans a lot of people will ever see, and they ask, well, who was Medgar Evers, who was Cesar Chavez, who's Gabby Giffords, we can talk about them and take that story of the American values that that ship represents.

Second is our partnership with industry. We don't build anything that we – that we use. And that partnership, industry deserves to make a fair return, but the taxpayers also deserve to get a good deal. We owe industry some things. We owe them stable designs – quit designing ships while you're building them. You'd think that would be pretty straightforward; it's not. If you get a new gee-whiz technology, put it on the next ship. Don't try to force it on the one you're building now. And let them know how many ships you're going to build and when, because in return they owe us some things. They owe us the infrastructure improvements and the training. And they owe us – if we keep the designs stable, every ship of the same class, every aircraft of the same class should come down in price.

And by the way, we've bought a lot more ships; it has not been at the expense of air. We've also bought 40 percent more aircraft in the last five years than in the five years that preceded it.

And finally, the international partnerships. We've got the naval attaché from Australia here. I travel a lot, and I travel for two reasons. One is to see sailors and Marines where they are, not where I am. And second is to work with our international partners. I've now been a million, 40,000 air miles; 132 different countries and territories. We're doing something with every single one of them. And it doesn't matter how big we are, it doesn't matter how good we are, we can't do this alone. And we've got to have those partnerships and they've got to be set up in times of calm, because in times of crisis you can surge people, you can surge equipment; what you cannot surge is trust. And so that's what we're building on a day-to-day basis.

So just in terms of value, the Navy and Marine Corps bring the best value for our taxpayers and our country where it counts, when it counts. So from the Navy, Semper Fortis, Always Courageous. From the Marines, Semper Fidelis, Always Faithful. Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

MR. HUGHES: Thank you so much, Mr. Secretary.

And I mentioned in my introduction the situation over at the Strait of Hormuz with the Iranian navy seizing the Marshall Islands-flagged vessel, and I wonder if you could bring us up to date, if there's anything new to report on that situation from the Navy perspective.

SEC. MABUS: There has been no change in terms of the situation, at least at 11:00 when I headed down this way. We have the three patrol craft in the – in the region. We have the USS Farragut there, a guided-missile destroyer, in the region, and I think it's a pretty good example of presence to give our leaders options. So whatever our leadership decides, they've got a whole range of options because of those naval assets.

MR. HUGHES: The sea is a busy place these days, with piracy of the Horn – at the Horn of Africa, unrest around the Arabian Gulf, and migrants fleeing Africa in the

Mediterranean. How is the Navy handling its multiplicity of missions? And do you feel you have sufficient resources? And how should our allies be helping?

SEC. MABUS: I know these come up on cards, but can I ask who asked the question? It's a good reason I'm asking, it's not a bad reason. (Laughter.) First question gets a coin in all all-hands calls. (Laughter.)

We are handling the multiplicity of missions the same way we have always done it. I mean, I get debriefed every time a carrier strike group comes back in and every time an amphibious ready group comes back, and the one sure thing – the one certainty is that they have faced something that they did not expect. And the way that you do that is you've got to have very flexible platforms and very flexible people.

We push responsibility down further and faster than any other organization. We expect our very youngest sailors and Marines to do a great job, and we are not disappointed. But we train to the maximum extent that we can, but they've got to know – and they do – that there are going to be things coming over the horizon that are unexpected, and they're going to have to deal with it in real time.

I think the American people have reason to believe that we can spend less money now that we've come out of two land wars, and they're right. But doing it with sequester or something like that is just dumb. That's a technical term; I apologize for it. (Laughter.) But you know, it's not putting money against strategy, it's not putting money where we think it needs to go. It's just cutting, mindlessly cutting.

And so the president's budget for this year that we just finished testifying about gives us the resources that we need to do the – to do the missions that the country expects us to do. And again, if you miss a year on things like shipbuilding, you can't get it back.

And finally, we have great allies. We really do. We have an agreement with the Australians on biofuels, so that when we deploy the Great Green Fleet we're going to be able to buy biofuels in Australia. And we have exercises all over the world. We have operations together all over the world. And it's imperative that our allies do continue to do this, but also step up their game a little bit in terms of what they're spending on, how much they're spending, because the world is getting more complicated, not less; more dangerous, not less; and the myriad of threats, there's no one threat stream anymore. There are state actors. There are non-state actors. There are irregular warfare. There's transnational crime. There's everything that you can think of. And every one of us is going to be affected by it. Every one of us has to – has to bear fair share of the burden there.

MR. HUGHES: Is there any discussion or consideration of moving a second carrier into the Gulf region, as was the case about three years ago, when one carrier was removed?

SEC. MABUS: No. (Laughter.) I'll give you a little longer answer than that.

The thing that was the aberration was the two carriers there. One carrier gives us all the presence, all the firepower that we – that we need, along with associated ships.

And I'll give you an example of presence. When the decision was made to strike ISIS, the carrier was on station in less than 30 hours conducting strikes, and for 54 days it was the only strike option. And it wasn't because we didn't have other assets, other aircraft in the region. We did. But the countries where they were would not give them permission to arm and take off. We didn't have to ask anybody. We were flying off of sovereign American territory.

MR. HUGHES: Speaking of carriers, this questioner notes that the carrier-based air operations now allow us to protect our – project our presence anywhere in the world on a moment's notice, and that is was over a century ago that this really breakthrough technology, this breakthrough ability, occurred. What can the Navy do in 2015 that will rival this breakthrough? Or what will be the, you know, next great breakthrough, similar to the way the carrier was a century ago?

SEC. MABUS: Well, part of that answer may be the carrier because the carrier is exactly that; it's what takes off the deck that's more important than what's on the deck. And I talked about unmanned. I mean, that's the revolution that's here: autonomous, unmanned vehicles that can do ISR, that can do strike, that can do really long-term monotonous tasks like refueling, but can do it all autonomously. And we've got a whole lot of other cutting-edge technology and cutting-edge science project(s). We've got a laser weapon now in the – in the Arabian Gulf. We've got railgun under development. We've got some, as I said, gee-whiz scientific stuff going on.

Part of – part of my job and part of our jobs is to get those from the lab to the warfighter quicker, because that railgun, we've been working on that since the '80s. We're going to put it on a ship to test it next year. That's just way too long, way too long, and we've got to cut through some of that.

MR. HUGHES: We have a few different questions related to drones.

Will drones replace attack planes and fighters?

And another questioner says: Your comments about the F-35 being the last manned fighter drew criticism from aviators. Why is it more important to move more briskly into these unmanned systems?

SEC. MABUS: Yeah, but it drew praise from John McCain – (laughter, laughs, applause) – who I believe is an aviator himself.

It's important – well, number one, we're always – we always want to have two generations of aircraft on our – on our decks. And I said, and I believe, that the F-35, as

much as we need it, as much as we want it, as much as we're looking forward to having it in the fleet, should be and almost certainly will be our last manned aircraft.

The F-35 itself, one of the big selling points for it is it makes decisions so fast that the pilot is not involved in a lot of those – in a lot of those decisions. To have the endurance, to have the payload, to have stealth characteristics, unmanned is the only way you're going to get to a lot of places. I mean, you cannot subject the human body to the stresses in terms of G-forces or duration that you can – that you can do with unmanned, and we're not going to be putting people in harm's way. I mean, our – the ship formally known as the Littoral Combat Ship, now the frigate, has unmanned underwater mine-seeking capabilities. Today on minesweepers, we put sailors in the middle of a minefield and tell them to go find it. I think it's a lot better to have an unmanned vehicle out there looking for those mines. And then we've got both manned and unmanned ways to neutralize them, mainly from the air. But if we don't keep up in this, if we don't lead in this, we are very certainly going to be bypassed in this because we're not the only ones working on this.

And if you are a – I've said this before. If you're a 10-year old who wants to be a naval aviator, you're going to get to be a naval aviator for a career, because we'll have manned aircraft for that long. But if you're born in a couple of years, you may not be in that manned aircraft. But you can still be a naval aviator it'll just be in very different way.

MR. HUGHES: We've been talking about the F-35. Now that additional F-18s have been added to the budget, will the Navy maintain its commitment to the F-35?

SEC. MABUS: Yes. (Laughter.)

MR. HUGHES: Questioner wants to know about the V-22 Osprey and saying – noting that it's come a long way. And can you comment about the usefulness of the V-22?

SEC. MABUS: You know, the Osprey, the tilt-rotor aircraft that the Marine Corps has is a phenomenal aircraft. In fact, yesterday the defense minister from Japan was here. Japan has just bought some Ospreys. And he wanted to go to Norfolk to see some of our ships. And so we got on an Osprey at the Pentagon and we – and he went to Norfolk and back, landed at the Pentagon again. In Afghanistan, it proved its worth in terms of how fast it could get in, how much protection it gave, how quickly it got people in and out of the danger zone close to the ground. We are still learning some of the things this aircraft can do.

And we just picked it as the replacement for the COD, for the carrier onboard delivery aircraft, because the Osprey doesn't have to be tail-hooked onto the carrier. It can land on a different spot, doesn't interfere with the flight operations. And also, the COD can only land on carriers. The Osprey can land everywhere in the strike group.

And so we're going to be able to get away from this hub and spoke with the carrier and go and take things and people directly to the ships that they're needed in.

MR. HUGHES: The world's only operational laser was deployed last year to the Gulf on the USS Ponce Command Vessel. Is the laser still deployed? And what capability does it bring to any potential confrontation with Iranian military vessels?

SEC. MABUS: Yes, it's still deployed. It's deployed in a test mode, but we can knock down unmanned aircraft now with it. We can knock out boats – small boats, which are some of the – two of the big threats in that region. It's a fairly small weapon. We're developing – we're continuing the development. And as you can imagine, energy power is the critical thing here. It's got to be able to charge up a battery or some storage thing, release it instantly, and then recharge.

But if you want to talk about value, we're shooting multimillion dollar missiles now at other missiles. A shot of a laser costs less than a dollar. So we ought to be able to save some money and do a better job in the future as these become more common in the fleet.

MR. HUGHES: How do you see the role of America's submarine forces fitting in over the next decade? And any changes in the submarines?

SEC. MABUS: Well, we have dominance in the undersea domain and I expect that to continue for the next 10 years and beyond. The boats that we're building now, to include the John Warner, are by far the most technologically advanced boats in the world. As I said, we're building two a year.

And the ones we're building today, numbers 13, 14, 15 of the Virginia-class, don't bear much resemblance to the Virginia, to the first one. The technology has improved that fast. And it's changed that fast. And we're getting it onto those submarines that fast. Most people don't think of submarines as a multi-mission platform. They are. They do an amazing variety and range of missions. And I think I'll stop there in terms of what they do, but they're pretty astounding.

But we're going to have to replace our ballistic missile submarines, the Ohio-class, starting in 2021. This is a national program. This is one of the legs of the triad of our nuclear deterrence. If Navy has to bear the entire bill, it's going to talk about half of our shipbuilding budget every year. Now, I don't want to pay for one Navy ship with another Navy ship. So I'm going to try to protect shipbuilding. But it's going to just kill something in Navy.

And CNO and I have been talking about this publicly. Either Navy has got to get plussed-up or we got to establish a national fund to do this. And Congress has established the fund, they haven't funded it yet, but they have seen the need for this. And as I said, we've got until 2021 to come up with an answer here. But if we built those, we would also – and we took the money out of shipbuilding, we would not only damage

greatly our surface fleet, we would also damage our attack submarines to a degree that's just not acceptable.

MR. HUGHES: Army General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, plans to retire later this year. There's a lot of speculation about who will fill the spot, including talk about Marine Commandant General Joseph Dunford. Can you offer any insight and what input do you, as the secretary of Navy have, in helping the president choose military leaders?

SEC. MABUS: I think I have a lot of input on the commandant and the chief of naval operations. When it comes to chairman and vice chairman, that's a little bit different process. And Joe Dunford is one of the finest people and officers that I've ever, ever met. But I'll give you my notion of the hierarchy here. There's secretary of the Navy. There's secretary of defense, chairman of the joint chiefs. There's the president. There's God. (Laughter.) And there's the commandant. (Laughter, applause.)

MR. HUGHES: Would you ever support having a secretary for the Marine Corps?

SEC. MABUS: No. (Laughter.)

MR. HUGHES: The Navy has until 2016 to open all combat jobs to women or request a waiver from Congress. Will you allow women to be Navy SEALs? Why or why not?

SEC. MABUS: Well, number one, the only part of the Navy – the only part that is currently closed to women are trigger pullers for the SEALs. SEAL enablers – intel, logistics, communications – have women in them that deploy with SEAL teams for a good while now. And the evaluation is going on right now in terms of what the recommendation is going to be.

My notion, and this is personal, 80 percent of men don't make it through BUD/S. Have some standards. Make sure the standards have something to do with the job, and then whoever can pass, whoever can make it through, do it. (Applause.)

MR. HUGHES: Questioner notes that women now serve on submarines. Tell us how that has worked out – the good, the bad and the ugly. (Laughter.)

SEC. MABUS: I made the decision for women to serve on submarines in June of 2010. The next month the CNO made – and I got to tell you, nobody cared. I mean, it was just sort of a big nothing. The next month the CNO at the time, Gary Roughead, banned smoking on submarines. Everybody cared. (Laughter.) We've had women now for several cruises on our ballistic missile submarines, on our guided missile submarines. First women have begun reporting to our attack submarines now. And they're earning their dolphins, they're doing the things.

And again, it's – there's no news here. They're American sailors and they're doing an amazing job under the sea. And but I'll repeat what I said during the speech, we don't have enough. And we've got to do a better job of getting and keeping women in the Navy and the Marine Corps.

MR. HUGHES: You have been a champion of renewable and green energy technology. How much of an impact will this effort have on the Navy's energy costs? And should more ships be built using nuclear propulsion technology?

SEC. MABUS: In answer to the first question, I said we're going to get to a gigawatt of renewable energy by the end of this year. Every one of those is a public-private partnership – every single one. And every one is saving us money. So they're cheaper. We will save money on all these things ashore.

Afloat, it does not make economic sense to do nuclear on other surface ships besides carriers or on other ships besides submarines. We will – we will continue to build those as nuclear. Oil has to be a good bit higher than it's ever been for a sustained period of time to make nuclear make sense in terms of upfront capital costs.

We only have three requirements for biofuels. One, it's got to be a drop-in fuel. We're not changing our engines in any way. Two is it can't take any land out of food production. So we're not buying ethanol. We're buying second generation, third generation biofuels. And third, it's got to be cost competitive. And even with the dramatic decline in oil and gas, we think that it's going to be cost competitive, and it's certainly going to be cost competitive over time.

And it's creating jobs in America. I mean, these are our feedstocks. We don't care where it comes from, but our feedstocks so far have come from used cooking oil, from agricultural waste, from landfills and from algae. And whatever else scientists can come up with, we're in the market for.

MR. HUGHES: This questioner says: The U.S. Marines left behind \$500 million in weapons and other gear in Yemen when they were forced to retreat and abandon the embassy. Has this military equipment fallen into the hands of terrorists? Or what do we know, if anything, about its whereabouts?

SEC. MABUS: Well, I think that number, 500 million (dollars), is too high by a factor of several zeros. I mean, it's news to me if Marines' individual weapons cost quite that much, or even their crew-served weapons. I know it hadn't fallen into any bad hands because Marines destroyed everything before they left. And it was a – it was a decision that – about the way they left that was not made by the Marine Corps. Our Marines are pretty attached to their weapon. And they don't – (laughter) – they don't go many places without it.

MR. HUGHES: Question says: You served as U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Do you see any kind of nuclear arms race breaking out in the Middle East and other parts

of the world when the Iranian nuclear arms negotiations conclude and sanctions are lifted?

SEC. MABUS: Well, certainly one of the reasons those negotiations are taking place is to make sure that one of those arms races does not occur, particularly in the Middle East. And you – what the president has said about this, about these negotiations, about the framework or the final deal, it's to lower tensions and make the Middle East, in that regard, a little safer. That is an interesting place in the world. And I did serve as ambassador there. And as you look around the world, it's not the only place that we've got things going on, but there sure seem to be a good many things going on in that – in that neighborhood.

MR. HUGHES: We're almost out of time, but I want to remind the audience about some upcoming speakers before I ask the last question or two in a minute. Vint Cerf, the chief internet evangelist for Google and a father of the internet, will address a National Press Club luncheon on Monday. And Lieutenant General Michelle Johnson, the first woman to lead the Air Force Academy, will speak on May 8th. And "How Was Your Last Flight?" the CEOs of American, Delta and United Airlines will appear together at a luncheon on May 15th.

I'd now like to present our guest with the prized possession of the National Press Club. That is our coffee mug. And I'm aware that you've spoken here, I think, three times previously. So you may be working on a set. (Laughter.) That makes it especially valuable. (Applause.)

Now, we're running out of time. I might have time for a couple questions, but one questioner mentions the Navy winning streak against the Army in the football game, and wonders if the game is starting to lose a little interest because of the consistent Navy winning. Does something need to happen there so that Army can win? Is this bad for the morale of the country, when one service wins all the time? I mean, how are you going to handle this? (Laughter.)

SEC. MABUS: Well, obviously, I think this is wonderful for the country. (Laughter.) But I tell you, we're going to be humble about this. We're going to take this one decade at a time. (Laughter, applause.)

MR. HUGHES: And last question, we mentioned in the introduction you made some appearances on "NCIS." Are there any more appearances forthcoming? And what do you think about the show's portrayal of the NCIS versus the real thing?

SEC. MABUS: Well, number one, you forgot to mention "Battleship." I had a line in that one. (Laughter.) Commence air operations. (Laughter.) I had to center myself, get into character. And there's a – there's a series that was on last year coming up again, called "The Last Ship," that second episode, keep an eye on it. (Laughter.) So the only thing, I can't get paid in this job for doing these things. So I can't get my SAG card. So I – but I do have my own IMDB page, which pretty cool. (Laughter.)

The “NCIS” show – number one, I wish we had the type of equipment that they do. (Laughter.) But just from my standpoint, and I think from the Navy’s standpoint, the storylines that they pursue, the way that they handle them I think has been a great benefit to the Navy and the NCIS in helping people understand what it is that we do, how broad the scope is. And this has been the most popular show on TV for more than a decade now. And the fact that so many people have that window into the Navy is great.

And to go back to your last question, it is “NCIS: Naval Criminal Investigative Service.” There’s not another show called CID or – (laughter) – Air Force Investigative Service – (laughter) – so I think that speaks volumes. (Laughter, applause.)

MR. HUGHES: How about a round of applause for our speaker? (Applause.) I’d also like to thank our National Press Club staff, including its Journalism Institute and Broadcast Center for organizing today’s event. And if you would like a copy of today’s program or to learn more about the club, go to our website, press.org.

We are adjourned. Thank you.

(END)