

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
Naming Ceremony of T-AKE 14  
NASSCO Shipyard  
San Diego, California  
Wednesday, May 18, 2011

Mr. Fred Harris, thank you so much for that introduction. I am really happy to be here at NASSCO. I drove over on Cesar Chavez Parkway and I tried to go to lunch at Las Quatras Milpas, but the line was too long. I absolutely love coming out to San Diego and visiting with Sailors and Marines who are doing the work of our Fleet, and with the men and women who make it all possible by building our ships. Monday, I had the chance to fly in the back seat of an F-18 out to the carrier *JOHN C. STENNIS* and the incredible experience of getting trapped and launched off that carrier.

While I was on *STENNIS*, I got to visit with the crew of the ship, who are in the middle of training that they are going to need on their upcoming deployment. That is an incredibly difficult and complex task, because once they deploy and sail west, once the city of San Diego harbor and Coronado Island dip below the horizon, it is anybody's guess what the next six or seven months will bring for that crew.

Because uncertainty is the only real certainty in naval operations. On March 10<sup>th</sup>, the carrier *RONALD REAGAN*, also homeported here in San Diego, and had left here earlier, was heading to do combat operations in support of our ground troops in Afghanistan. One day later, in the wake of the March 11<sup>th</sup> earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan, *REAGAN* was steaming full-speed towards Japan's northeast coast, to deliver humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

I had the chance to visit the *REAGAN* in Japan last month and talk with some of those Sailors who oversaw the relief operations. On their own, they had taken the lessons they had learned for precise targeting of the enemy in Afghanistan into humanitarian aid for the people in Japan. Same platform, same people, but an entirely different mission.

Nobody else, nobody else but the United States Navy could have done what those Sailors and Marines did. No other country in the world could have pivoted that fast and come as quickly and decisively to the aid of a friend.

And it is not just those at sea, and it's not just those in uniform, that have made the Navy what it is. I want to take this opportunity to thank NASSCO for everything you have done to make our Navy better. I want to thank you for the amazing and skilled work you do in building Navy ships, like the T-AKEs, and thank the workers here for all that you do every day.

For the last two years I've been talking about acquisition excellence, which is just a fancy way of saying we need to get more ships, cheaper, for the Navy. I've been talking about the need to do things right, to get the contracts right, about the yards taking ownership of projects, learning lessons while ships are being built, and bringing in every ship of a class cheaper and faster than the ship before it.

NASSCO has done that. NASSCO has been a tremendous partner, and every single shipfitter and steelworker here deserves a lot of credit. You do things right. And because of that, because of what you do, you make our Navy stronger and America more secure.

T-AKEs are the glue that hold the Fleet together. They carry ammunition, dry stores, food, and repair parts, 25,000 barrels of fuel, and 50,000 gallons of fresh water. The T-AKE's literally keep the fleet running, and they are everywhere the fleet is, in the Indian Ocean, off Somalia, in the Mediterranean north of Libya, in the Sea of Japan, and off South America.

And like every other ship of the fleet, they've been asked to do more, to go beyond their mission as just supply ships and become active participants in operations. Last year, T-AKE 1, the *LEWIS AND CLARK*, served as an Afloat Forward Staging Base for the coalition force that's responsible for the anti-piracy efforts off the coast of Somalia. In 2009, the *RICHARD E. BYRD* (T-AKE 4) led Pacific Partnership, and took medical, dental, veterinary, and civil engineering services to places like Samoa, Tonga, the Solomons, and the Marshalls, where the embarked teams treated over 11,000 medical and 4,400 dental patients. These ships, your ships, built here, like our entire Navy, are forward deployed around the world, around the clock.

The *T-AKE* ships are named for American pioneers, American explorers, and American visionaries, right here in front of me. They celebrate the dreams that represent the American spirit. These are men and women who "dreamed of things that never were". Those honored by the 13 ships already named have included civil rights leaders, polar explorers, aviators, and scientists. They represent the multi-hued tapestry that is America and today we add another heroic piece to that tapestry.

Cesar Chavez carried on the proud traditions of those we have honored here before. Born in Yuma, Arizona, in 1927 to a Mexican-American family, he was raised in the fields of California, working the crops with his family. Wages were poor, the housing was poor, and to help support his family he dropped out of school after the eighth grade.

In 1944, Cesar Chavez joined the US Navy, serving for two years. He would relate a story to his children about being in Japan with the Navy and passing a small dance club in Tokyo where he heard Mexican music. As he said to his children, "I had to go to Japan to hear music from home."

His service was difficult, because Cesar Chavez faced a segregated Navy, but that challenge like others he faced in his life, helped forge the leader he became. His example blazed a path for subsequent generations.

His example will live through this ship. He will continue to inspire young Americans to do what is right. For the next generation, more than thirty years, the *CESAR CHAVEZ* will sail hundreds of thousands of miles, and will bring support and assistance to thousands upon thousands of people, acting a lot like its namesake. Everywhere it goes, the story of Cesar Chavez will spread. And the words "Si, se puede" will echo around the world.

It is my honor to name the fourteenth ship of this class for a true American pioneer, a labor leader, and a civil rights visionary. Today we honor an American who fought tirelessly and

fearlessly for other Americans, for Hispanics workers, for farm workers, for all workers. Please help me welcome to the Fleet the Navy's newest ship, the USNS *CESAR CHAVEZ*.