

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
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Rear Admiral Carter, thank you, and I am glad to be back in Newport.

He and I were talking on the drive over. I sat where you did, where you're sitting now. I went to communications school here, although we didn't have quite this nice a building. I hope they've torn that one down.

And it's been a few years. I counted up and I'm not even going to remotely tell you how many years it's been since I last sailed under what we called "the \$2 bridge" going to – putting out to sea. The reason we called it "the \$2 bridge" was then, in the early '70s, the toll was \$2. It was astounding that it was that much. And we would take bearings and call it "the \$2 bridge."

I say all those things because I want to start this talk by telling you a naval story of mine. I did ROTC at Ole Miss. And I went through Ole Miss in three years, and I took the last two years of naval ROTC as one year, so I had to take my midshipman cruise after I graduated.

That was the summer of 1969. I went to the Med, did my cruise, and when it came time for me to leave, I had orders to fly back in to New York from Naples, and I was told to go to Columbia University and be commissioned at the ROTC unit there.

So I did. And I got to New York the night before, and the next morning called the captain who was commanding the Columbia ROTC unit about arranging to come out and be commissioned. And one of the things he said – he said, now, you don't have to wear a uniform if you don't want to – which is a strange thing to tell somebody about to be commissioned into the armed forces of the United States.

And I asked him why not, and he said, well, there'd been riots about ROTC the year before, at Columbia. And he was a little bit concerned about safety. And he said that nobody wore their uniforms out around campus.

My notion was that if I was going to be commissioned I was pretty clearly going to do it in uniform. So I put on my uniform, got on the subway, went up to Columbia. Nothing happened. But the notion that you shouldn't wear a military uniform, even on the day you were getting commissioned, was not a strange notion in 1969.

You're in a very different Navy. You're in a very different military from the one I was in. The relationship that the Navy today, and the military today, has with the American people is a fundamentally different one than when I was in. During and immediately after Vietnam, the military, frankly, was not very trusted. It was not something that a lot of people looked at as something to be trusted, or emulated, or to identify with.

Now in that period of time, from '69 until now, the American military has gone from that relationship to being the most trusted institution in America. Americans have separated the warrior from the war, regardless of what Americans think about any conflicts we're in. The trust, the confidence, the level of respect for the military is higher than for any other institution in this country, and that didn't just happen. That wasn't an accident. A lot of people who wore the uniform worked very hard. A lot of people have sacrificed a lot. They lived up to a very high standard. They held themselves and others accountable. And because of that, the level of trust, the level of respect, the level of confidence in the military is as high as it is. But – that's a fragile thing, and it can be undone.

Now, the people I'm talking to here today, you're the current and the future leaders, not just of our Navy, but our military. And Admiral Carter talked about the various commands here, starting with the War College, but also the Department Heads, School for Surface Warfare, the Command Leadership School, Supply School, so many others – so many other commands.

You're all on your way back to the fleet for command or very high levels of responsibility, and that's the reason the War College was founded: to prepare people for that responsibility, to prepare people to command, to prepare people to lead, and to do so with ethics, with integrity, to measure up to the exceptionally high standards that we do and should hold people to.

Every time a Commanding Officer gets relieved for bad behavior, every time there's an ethical lapse, and I'm talking now about whether uniformed or civilian, every time it erodes that trust that the American people have in us. And the misdeeds of the very few – and I want to

emphasize I am talking about the very few, now, both in terms of numbers and in terms of percentages – but the misdeeds of the very few have the potential to undermine the great work of the many. Every bad headline about unethical behavior, about unprofessional behavior, has the potential to do great damage.

Now, having said that, I will repeat what I said at a press conference in December at the Pentagon: I would rather get a bad headline than let bad people get away with something. And I think those things – the way to keep the trust in the face of some bad acts, in the face of unethical behavior, is by that long Navy tradition of being absolutely transparent. When we find misconduct – pretty unique, not only in the military, but also in America – we announce it. We are completely transparent, particularly for those in places of high responsibility. We do it for a couple of reasons – partly to act as a deterrent, but mainly because it's just the right thing to do.

Now, some of the cases that we've been dealing with, all the ethics classes, all the speeches, all the instructions, all the guidelines, all the rules aren't going to help one bit. If you don't know it's wrong it cheat, if you don't know it's wrong to steal, if you don't know it's wrong to take a bribe, ethics training probably isn't going to help you. You missed something that your mother told you a long, long time ago.

And so the only way we're going to reach those people is to set up a system of oversight, of accountability, to find these acts when they happen – and to hold people accountable for it. I've spent a lot of my public life trying to do that. My first elective office, before I was governor, I

was State Auditor of Mississippi, charged with looking at every dollar of money – taxpayer money – that was spent in that state, whether local or federal or state money.

There have been two cases that have gotten a lot of ink, a lot of attention, and I'm going to talk about them very briefly. One is Glenn Defense Marine Asia, husbanding contract, that – the allegations are that the head of Glenn Defense Marine bribed people, including an NCIS agent, bribed officers to tell him what our classified ship movements were so he'd know what ports to get ready to bid on, bribed people to give him the contracts, gave gifts – lavish, completely inappropriate gifts – to higher-level people.

But the thing that has not come out as much as it should have is that the reason you're reading these headlines – the reason you're hearing about Glenn Defense Marine – is that we found it. Activities that that company engaged in moved across some tripwires and caused NCIS to begin an investigation. That investigation went on for three years, and it never leaked.

And one of the things that that investigation found was that there was an NCIS agent who was taking money and providing information on where the investigation was going. So NCIS – I'll put it this way – gave him information that wasn't completely accurate.

We did it. We found this. And that's what I meant about I would rather have a bad headline than allow somebody that's doing this to get away.

Now, right now that case is with the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of California. But whatever action, criminal action, that the U.S. Attorney takes, if there are people involved for whom the statute of limitations has passed, or that didn't do anything criminal but violated Navy ethics, or may have violated Navy ethics, I've set up a consolidated disposition authority and we will hold those people accountable, and it's a higher standard than just criminal acts.

The other thing that's gotten some attention lately is the cheating at the Nuclear Power School. And once again, the reason that came to light was a Sailor was approached about participating in the cheating and he said no. And he not only said no, he reported it. And in both cases, we were the ones that made it public. In both cases, we didn't try to hide it, didn't try to sweep anything under the rug, and in fact, in the Nuclear Power School we announced it two days after we found out about it.

Now, as I've said, if you don't know it's wrong to cheat, if you don't know it's wrong to take bribes, you're not going to respond much to ethics or rules, but we can set up a system to make sure that, whatever those bad acts are, that they don't go unaccounted for, and that when we find them, that people are held accountable, and held publicly accountable. But when you get past that obvious stuff, when you get down to the day-to-day, some of the hard choices that we all have to make, we hold people – and we should – to a much higher standard than any other organization, any other part of society.

And that's the reason, that's the bedrock reason that that trust is there from the American people. They know we hold people to a higher standard. They expect us to, and we expect us to. And

that's what a big part of leadership is all about. It's about upholding those higher standards, not just for other people, but for yourself. It's about being a model. It's about not cutting corners. It's about not giving excuses.

And there's a lot of levels and types of leadership. I mean, one is speaking up if you see something that's going wrong. Another is listening to when other people are trying to tell you something is going off the rails. And it's about loyalty to an institution, making a decision that's good for Navy or Marine Corps – making decisions that are good for the nation.

And it pops up in some interesting places. One of the things that I get to do – it is not my favorite task by any means, but I get packages of promotion cases, where somebody has done something that's just not acceptable – a DUI, things like that – and the question is whether to promote or not. And on the package that comes to me, there is a chain of command. Does the Commanding Officer recommend promotion? Does the next in the chain recommend promotion? All the way up to the CNO.

And I have to say it is very rare – very rare – for the immediate superior to recommend not to promote. And in the times when I've just asked out of curiosity, it's usually, well, I didn't want to hurt somebody's career; he's a good guy; she's a good person; I didn't want to rock the boat. That's not making decisions based on institutional integrity.

Now, you ought to do it on a case-by-case basis. I'm not saying that there ought to be a lot of non-promote things here. But it ought to be done with the notion: Would you like to be

commanded by that person? Would you like to have your son or daughter commanded by that person, supervised by that person?

And it comes out in fitness reports, too. Nobody wants to be a bad person. Nobody wants to upset a career. And it's a little bit like school, when teachers just say, all I got to do is make it till May, and then that kid's going to be somebody else's problem. It's just passing along the problem. That's what you've got to think about. That's what you've got to – that's a test of leadership.

And I'm also not saying be bad to people, be nasty to people, try to ruin careers – but do hold people accountable. Do hold yourself accountable.

Now, the one thing I'm definitely not talking about – the goal is not some sort of a defect-free force, a mistake-free force. When Admiral Roughead was CNO he kept a copy of Chester Nimitz's fitness report. As a young officer, after he had run his ship aground he was court-martialed for it. He was exonerated at court-martial. He was a destroyer captain, and he said – his defense at court-martial was: I have been trained to be aggressive and I was being aggressive, using my ship, getting close to shore in order to support troops on the ground.

I don't know what would have happened in World War II if we had been this mistake-free force then and Chester Nimitz hadn't continued his Navy career. That's not the goal. But there's a big difference – there's a big difference between taking measured risk – which we want to encourage; we don't want to encourage just conformity, don't want to encourage just doing

exactly what you have to do without taking any sort of risk or taking any sort of initiative.

There's a big difference between that and ethical lapses.

Now, it is not easy today. It is not easy today to be a leader. It's not easy today in the Navy or the Marine Corps, in the military. Our deployments are long and they're getting longer. The Marine Corps is drawing down. If you watch the news, as I suspect most of you do, you know that there are financial issues about the military in Washington and what we're going to be able to do.

But hard times make leadership even more crucial. It's pretty easy to manage in good times.

Hard times is not a reason not to make some of the hard decisions. Hard times is not an excuse to become lax, to say, well, one little thing won't hurt.

And I'll tell you one more political story. When I was running for state auditor, a guy I was trying to get to support me said, well, I got a question for you. He said, do you think stealing \$5 is as bad as stealing \$5 million? And I said, yes. It's just a matter of degree. It's not a matter of kind. And he said that was the answer he was looking for. He said: I'll support you.

A lot of cities have driven down crime because they started enforcing all the laws – small ones as well as big ones, misdemeanors as well as felonies. It's really hard to tell people they ought to pay attention to the big things when you're not willing to pay attention to the small things, because people notice, and they learn, and they act accordingly.

Finally, you have earned the positions that you have and the positions you're going to. You have earned the right to be here. The military is the most merit-based organization I have ever been privileged to be a part of. You are absolutely the right people to be assuming these positions of leadership, but as you do, remember the long journey. Remember the journey from the middle of Vietnam till today. Remember those that came before you that had to repair the relationship between the American people and the American military. Remember those who had to do that work to make sure that the trust was there with the people that you defend with your lives and with your careers.

So I'll go back to that day in 1969. That day, when I was commissioned I was given a piece of paper, and it was my commission – same piece of paper every one of you who are wearing a uniform got – reposing a special trust and confidence is on that commission, and you uphold that every single day by leadership, by integrity, by your willingness to serve America.

So from the Navy, Semper Fortis: Always Courageous.

From the Marine Corps, Semper Fidelis: Always Faithful.

Thank you.