

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
USNS Brunswick Christening  
Mobile, Alabama  
Saturday, May 9, 2015

Great. Thank you. Thank you for letting me in even though I don't have my badge. (Laughter.)

To everyone here today, most especially Mayor Harvey from Brunswick to our sponsor, Lee Booterbaugh, to Craig Perciavalle and the shipbuilders of Austal, to our Navy representatives, Admiral Shannon, Admiral Braun, and to all our Navy friends, to our legislators and mayors, and state commissioners from Alabama who've done so much to help Austal develop the workforce and the infrastructure that you needed.

When our founders put together the Constitution, they said that Congress had the authority to raise an Army when it was needed, but it was mandated that it maintain a Navy. And that not-so subtle distinction shows us the difference in exactly what makes America's Navy and Marine Corps so vital to our nation's security. It's as Admiral Shannon said: it's presence. And we uniquely provide that presence around the globe, around the clock, ensuring stability, deterring adversaries, providing our nation's leaders with options in times of crisis.

The Navy and Marine Corps are America's away team because our Sailors and Marines deploy equally as much in peacetime as in times of war. They're in the right place not just at the right time, but all the time. We can be on station faster. We can stay longer. We bring everything we need. And we don't have to ask anyone's permission to do the job that the nation needs done.

Our ability to provide that presence is built on four pillars: people – our Sailors, our Marines, our civilians; platforms – the ships, the aircraft, the weapons systems; power – the energy, how we fuel ships, how we fuel our bases; and partnerships – our strong relationship with industry, and with our friends and allies around the world.

When it comes to platforms, quantity has a quality all its own. In the five years before I became Secretary, the U.S. Navy put 27 ships under contract. That was not enough to keep our fleet size from declining – and it had declined dramatically from 2001 and 2008 – and it wasn't enough to keep our shipyards in business. In my first five years, we have put 70 ships under contract for the Navy, and we've done so with a smaller top line. And by the end of this decade, we will be back above 300 ships for the first time in more than a decade.

Now, back in Washington, ship counting numbers get bandied around because of politics. We're told not to count patrol craft in the Arabian Sea – in the Arabian Gulf, patrol craft who perform some of the most dangerous missions that we have. And that's

done because of politics. Now, we count them. Our combat commander counts them. I guarantee you the Iranians count them. We just can't count them as part of our battle force. Doing stuff like this just distracts from recognizing the reality of just how important it is with those gray hulls over the water where they are all the time.

You only have to turn on your TV for a few minutes or open a newspaper to know that, whether it's launching strikes on ISIS, sending a special-purpose Marine aircraft taskforce into Africa to fight Ebola, being ready to respond to the crisis in Yemen, or conducting maritime security operations while monitoring the - (inaudible) - the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps team are who America calls on in times of crisis, and we have to have ships to get us there.

And that brings me to why we're here today. I am always, always happy to be a part of a life of a new ship. This high-speed vessel represents some of our most innovative minds at work. What started out as being simply a troop transport vessel has morphed/flourished into a vessel that with absolutely limitless possibilities. I recently announced the results of our Task Force Innovation to the fleet. The main idea beyond all this was looking for ways to harvest the creative energy that resides within our fleet and our sailors, and infusing that into our operations.

And one way we're seeing that is in the operations of the high-speed vessels. They're flexible. They're adaptable. Those qualities make this ship a perfect platform for leaders to shape and meet the demands of the mission. One small example: a medical module makes this ship a hospital ship, an ambulance of the sea. We've just started to figure out the possibilities of what this ship can do.

This ship that you're sitting under is a modern marvel, as is this incredible shipyard that built it. And Craig, I am sure it is an absolute - (inaudible). But when Austal had 800 workers was the year that I took office. The fact that it's got 4,300 workers today, I hope I had some small hand in making that happen.

To our elected officials from Alabama, I'm from Mississippi. So I'm not going to announce for anything here in Alabama. (Laughter.)

The shipbuilders at Austal are joined by 4,000 craftsmen from all around the country in making the components of this ship and its systems. That partnership between our uniformed men and women, our Navy civilians, our industry and the American people is one of the great strengths of our system.

Now, I get to do a lot of cool things in this job, a lot of cool things. But maybe the coolest is I get to name every naval vessel. So, Mr. Mayor and our visitors from Brunswick, thank you for lending your name to this great ship. The name is an incredibly important part of a ship. And you've heard over and over, Brunswick is a city with shipbuilding in her roots. During World War II, again as you heard, more than 16,000 employees at J.A. Jones built 99 Liberty ships. And there were called "Knots," designed to transport materials to and from the European and Pacific theaters. So it's fitting that

the ship that's named for this great city rates some of our highest knots of any ship out there. Bearing the name Brunswick, this ship will represent the spirit of hard work and patriotism that the people of that city exemplify so well.

The USNS Brunswick will carry those values and this spirit around the world. It's tailor-made for the demands and the missions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, from the wide expanses of the Pacific to the littorals of Africa. She's fast, she's agile, shallow draft, and she will allow us to work in a lot of different ways with our allies, our partners, and our sister services.

This ship will be in the fleet for decades. And her crew will carry the spirit of Brunswick, and of America, to far-flung places. A lot of times, the mariners on these ships are the only Americans that foreigners will ever see, and they are amazing representatives of our country. American technology, American innovation have always led the world, from our first six frigates through the days of the ironclads to today's nuclear-powered ships. Ships like Brunswick, they give us a combat advantage.

But one other thing gives us a greater edge, and it's something that I'm reminded of every day that I am privileged to serve in this job. Our technology may give us one edge, but at the heart of the Navy and Marine Corps, the thing that gives us the great edge is the skill and dedication of the United States sailors, Marines, and civilian mariners who serve in these ships.

Now to the most important part of the ceremony, the sponsor. It is literally true that I would not be here today without Lee Booterbaugh. She is my scheduler. She has made sure that secretaries of the Navy for the last 15 years have been where they're supposed to be, when they're supposed to be there. I cannot imagine the Secretary's office working maybe at all, but certainly as well as it does, without Lee. She does everything with grace and good humor. We change schedules on her from time to time, sometimes with only a few minutes' notice, and she has put up with this and excelled at it for 15 years with the secretary and for more than 30 years at the Navy.

Being a sponsor goes all the way back to the founding of our Navy. Lee becomes an honorary member of the crew. She'll become plank owner of the first crew, and she will have a special relationship with this ship for as long as the ship sails. It is said, as you've heard, a sponsor infuses her spirit into the ship she sponsors. If this ship is as dedicated, is as devoted, is as wonderful as Lee Booterbaugh, this ship will be an amazing ship indeed. Thank you, Lee.

So now it's time to christen this new ship so the crew can take her to sea and defend our nation, just as their predecessors have done for 239 years. So, from the Navy, Semper Fortis, Always Courageous. From the Marines, Semper Fidelis, Always Faithful. Thank you.