

Presenters: Secretary of the Navy Raymond Mabus Jr.; Dr. Jill Biden; Senator Thomas R. Carper, D-Del.; Lieutenant Governor Matt Denn, D-Del.

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Remarks at Announcement of Naming of the Newest Virginia-Class Submarine in the Pentagon Briefing Room

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY RAYMOND MABUS JR.: Well, thank you all for being here. I particularly want to thank Dr. Biden for being here, the senior senator from Delaware, Tom Carper, and the lieutenant governor of Delaware, Matt Denn.

And, Dr. Biden, I understand you have brought your spouse with you.

DR. JILL BIDEN: Yes. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY MABUS: I'm pleased to announce today that one of our most advanced Navy platforms, a fast attack nuclear submarine, SSN-791, will be named USS Delaware. The name Delaware has been prominent and honored throughout our great naval history, but it is a name that has been out of our fleet for too long and I am happy to change that today.

Seven ships have been named for the First State, stretching back to Navy's earliest days of wooden ships under sail. The last USS Delaware was Navy's first Dreadnaught, a coal-burning, steam-powered, "all-big-gun" battleship, but that Delaware decommissioned in 1923.

Delaware will be part of the Virginia class, which are built to excel in traditional areas of submarine warfare, such as against other submarines, against surface targets, against targets on land, but Delaware will have some non-traditional capabilities, as well, gathering intelligence and delivering Navy SEALs undetected to their missions.

During her service, which will begin in 2018, Delaware may patrol the waters from the North Atlantic to the Western Pacific to under the Arctic ice. Construction of the USS Delaware will begin next year and will be shared by two shipyards, Huntington Ingalls in Virginia and General Dynamics Electric Boat in Connecticut.

These submarines are a great success story. They have been on or ahead of schedule and under budget. This summer, we commissioned another one of these great boats, USS Mississippi, well-named. (Laughter.)

That submarine set a record for the program's fastest delivery, a year ahead of schedule. The Virginia-class program has been a model for all our ship-building. In 2008, the year before this administration began, our fleet stood at 278 ships, 38 ships fewer than on 9/11/2001. But we have turned that around. While just three ships were built in 2008, we have in the last two years, in spite of a more challenging fiscal environment, put 42 ships under contract, most of them

fixed-price multi-year deals. We've increased competition and oversight, and we're on track to reach 300 ships before the end of the decade.

The Navy is unique in constructing these incredibly complex and technologically advanced platforms that are designed to last for 30, 40, even 50 years. There will be Sailors who serve on Delaware who are not yet born.

Today's Sailors operating these amazing platforms are incredibly talented, highly skilled, and eagerly accept the responsibility we demand from even the most junior crewmember. Most Americans don't realize what Sailors do or even know anyone in the Navy, because less than one percent of our population wears America's cloth. And when the Navy is doing our job, we're most often a long, long way from home. We are truly America's away team.

That's why we named some of our ships for states and other places in America, to remind our home for those who serve and a visible representation of America in every port around the globe. There's always a strong connection between the people of a state and the ship that bears its name.

For that and for many other reasons, I'm very proud to announce also today that Dr. Jill Biden has agreed to serve as sponsor of the USS Delaware. Dr. Biden, as you all know, our nation's Second Lady, a proud Blue Star mom, and a renowned and accomplished educator.

Her military connections run very deep and very strong. Many of us know of Beau Biden's service in the U.S. Army, including a deployment to Iraq. But a couple of weeks ago, it was announced that Dr. Biden's son, Hunter, will receive a commission in the United States Navy as a public affairs officer.

Her support of the military goes far beyond that of the service of her sons. Dr. Biden has co-sponsored with our First Lady, Michelle Obama, the national initiative "Joining Forces", providing support and expanding opportunities, for veterans and active-duty personnel and their families.

That exemplifies the commitment to those who serve and who have served and the strength of character of Jill Biden and of her home, the First State. I know Delaware's citizens will honor their state's namesake, follow her as she comes to life in a few years, and embrace those who sail in her for decades to come, as she, in turn, honors the First State's legacy as she sails the seas in defense of our nation and upholding her state's motto, Freedom and Liberty, and the Navy motto, Semper Fortis, forever courageous.

Now it's my happy privilege to introduce the sponsor of the USS Delaware, Dr. Jill Biden. (Applause.)

DR. BIDEN: Thank you. Thank you, Secretary Mabus, for that kind introduction. This is a very exciting day.

As a proud military mom and a very proud Delawarean, I am honored to sponsor the USS Delaware. One of the best parts of serving as Second Lady is that I have the opportunity to meet with so many members of our military and their families. I am always inspired by their strength and resilience. No matter what challenges they face, our men and women in uniform serve with courage and distinction. They are the reason we have the best, most powerful military in the world. And it's our duty to make sure that they have everything they need to stay safe and do their jobs. They need the very best equipment and technology that we can provide them with, and soon that will include the USS Delaware.

It's a special honor for me to sponsor this submarine, because I'm such a proud military mom. Four years ago, as the secretary alluded to, I stood in Dover, Delaware, watching as our son, Beau, prepared to deploy to Iraq with the Delaware Army National Guard. I remember it like it was yesterday.

And this year, I'm looking forward to standing with our son, Hunter, when he is commissioned as an ensign in the United States Navy. He follows in the footsteps of two of his grandfathers, who have also served in the Navy.

The Navy was a memorable part of my life as a young girl. My father would also always take my mother and his five daughters to watch the Blue Angels at Willow Grove Naval Air Station. His picture in his dress whites was proudly displayed by the front door of our home, and through his stories and beliefs, he engrained in all of us his sense of patriotism and pride in the Navy.

But most of all, I am honored for my state of Delaware, which is steeped in military history. For Delaware's war hero, Captain Thomas Macdonough, whose famous victory in the Battle of Plattsburgh helped end the War of 1812, to Newcastle, serving as the home of some of the first female Air Force pilots, to the thousands of Delawareans who have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, our state has so much to be proud of. And today, Delaware's 77,000 veterans carry on their rich tradition of service.

This great tradition of having a civilian-sponsored Navy vessels helps to cement the critical connection between our servicemembers and the civilians back home who love them, miss them, and owe them a debt of gratitude.

So in the years to come, I'm looking forward to meeting the Sailors who serve on the boat. I'm excited to get to know their families, because wherever the Delaware goes, all around the world, a little piece of my heart will go with her.

So thank you, Secretary Mabus, for this honor. Thank you all. And may God bless our servicemen and women and their families. Thank you. (Applause.)

SENATOR THOMAS R. CARPER, D-DEL.: Willow Grove Naval Air Station.

DR. BIDEN: Yeah. (Laughter.)

SEN. CARPER: Mr. Vice President, I remember when guys in my squadron used to look forward to the air show there to see -- hoping that five women that looked like Jill and her sisters would show up. (Laughter.) Never imagined --

DR. BIDEN: (off mic) girls. (Laughter.)

SEN. CARPER: Well, it's great to stand here next to you and Mr. Secretary. Thank you so much for reading that letter that we sent to you, our delegation sent to you a year or so ago, and the action that's being taken here today. And great to be here with our lieutenant governor and certainly with our -- the spouse of the sponsor of this ship.

Spent a lot of years of my -- in my life in the Navy, about 23 all in, plus another four as a naval midshipman. And I love the Navy. I love being part of the Navy, for all -- all those years. And I remember we used to fly in and out of Willow Grove Naval Air Station, but we actually, all over the world, my job when we weren't flying around in Southeast Asia was to track submarines. And we tracked Soviet ballistic fast attack boats, cruise boats, and our own, as well, in all the oceans of the world.

And we would also train with our own submarines. And I'm standing here before you to tell you that it wasn't all that hard to find the Soviet ballistic missile boats or the fast attack boats or the cruise missiles -- submarines, but we could almost never find ours. And they were a breed apart, and it was just so good, and great, wonderful people on the crews, some of the best and brightest in the Navy, and they knew their stuff. They knew their stuff.

Delaware -- and a lot of people don't think of Delaware much as a -- as maybe a Navy town, but when the first Swedes and Finns sailed across the Atlantic and pulled into the Christina River -- they named it the Christina River after the child queen of Sweden -- but they landed in a place that they declared -- which now Wilmington declared it the colony of New Sweden. And today, there's a replica of the ship that brought the first Swedes and Finns to -- to our state there at the -- on the Christina River.

And about a mile or so from where that ship lies at anchor, there is a compass rose that's literally embedded in the river walk that's part of our riverfront in Wilmington today. And on the compass rose, on the eight points of the compass rose, there are eight ships that are named -- all destroyer escorts. And they are some of the hundreds of ships that were built in Wilmington on the Christina River during World War II, ships that helped win the war, not only on the -- the destroyer escort side, but troop-landing ships and other ships, as well.

At the other end of the state, a place that our spouse of the sponsor knows well, is a place called Cape Henlopen State Park. And it used to be an all-military installation, and today it's a

beautiful state park, beautiful jewel for -- for people from all over the world to come to Delaware, and particularly to -- to there.

But one of the military installations that used to be there was a NAVFAC naval facility, which is part of the team that we used to track those Soviet submarines throughout the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, even the Mediterranean, as well. And I -- as a guy who was a -- as a Navy P-3 mission commander, I had the pleasure, not even knowing I was working with the folks in Delaware, but working with the NAVFAC and our efforts to track Soviet submarines carrying dozens of warheads that could have -- in a hot war situation, rain down on our -- on our -- on our state.

So there's a great Navy tradition in Delaware, great ship-building tradition in Delaware, and a great submarine tradition in Delaware that we celebrate here today. And I'll close with this. The day I was sworn into office and escorted into the Senate by -- by the vice president, when he was a mere mortal -- (Laughter) -- the -- but we have -- later on, we had a reception just to thank the people that had helped me in the campaign, and the vice president was good to come, Mike Castle was good to come. We had a wonderful time.

For the first time ever, I had a chance to -- people wanted autographs, and I would sign my name, Tom Carper, and then under that, I would sign, USS Delaware, United States senator from Delaware. I've signed that a thousand times. And the first time I ever signed it, I thought, you know, wouldn't it be great if we could have a ship named the USS Delaware? I thought that the first time I ever signed it. I signed my name that way just this morning. And I thought, again, finally, at last, we're going to have that ship.

So this is a very special day for those reasons and for many others. But I want to thank you, Mr. Secretary, and it's great to be here with our Second Lady and with our lieutenant governor and all of you to celebrate this day. Thank you.

Matt?

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR MATT DENN, D-DEL.: No one asked me for my autograph at my inauguration, so I don't have a similar story.

Mr. Vice President, it's a nice surprise to have you here today. I know that Pennsylvania has been trying to claim you for sometime. I saw yesterday that New Jersey had tried to claim you, and I'm very pleased that you could be here today so we could establish for the record that Delaware still has dibs on the vice president. Thank you for being here.

And, Secretary Mabus, on behalf of our state, thank you for the honor of allowing us to visit you here at the Pentagon today. And thank you, obviously, for your decision to name this ship after the great state of Delaware.

I also wanted to recognize Jill Biden's role here today and to thank her for her support of military families, between our Air Force base in Delaware and the extraordinary commitment of the Delaware National Guard in Iraq and Afghanistan, Beau being one of the many soldiers in

Delaware who have bravely stepped up to serve, Delaware families have really been a critical part of our nation's fight for safety and freedom, and we've seen the toll that that fight takes on families, both when their loved ones are away and for some when they return. And we really just can't thank you enough for the role that you've played and the attention that you've drawn to these families.

Some families, including families in Delaware, pay an especially heavy price and bear a heavier burden than others. And we actually stand here today, where the last Delawarean from the U.S. Navy was killed in hostile fire. Navy Mate Second Class Matthew Flocco was killed at the Pentagon on September 11th. I met his parents years ago at a park in Delaware that was named after him, just about a block from my sister's house in Newark, and I've gotten to know his mom a little bit. I just called her this morning to tell her that I would be down here.

Last year, on the 10th anniversary of the September 11th attacks, she told me about her mixed emotions on September 11th, how much she appreciated all the attention every September 11th that was paid to her son's memory, but also how much harder it made it for her to come to terms with his loss. And I wanted to honor today the memory of Matthew Flocco, who died here on September 11th.

We in Delaware are honored to have a ship named after our state. We're honored to have Dr. Jill Biden as the sponsor of this ship. And I accept that honor on behalf of each man and woman in our state who has put himself or herself in harm's way to defend our country. It's really their talent and bravery that forms the backbone of our military. And, again, very pleased to be here today on behalf of Delaware. (Applause.)

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