

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
USS Iowa (SSN 797) Naming Ceremony  
Iowa State University  
Ames, Iowa  
Wednesday, September 2, 2015

Thank you so much, President Leath. Thank you for the great national anthem that we had earlier.

I want to single out a couple of people. One is Terry Branstad, my friend and fellow governor. I was running for governor 28 years ago, and he was already governor. (Laughter.) I've been out of office for 24 years, and he's still governor. (Laughter.) It shows you what the difference in quality is. (Laughter.) No, Terry Branstad and I became friends when we were governors together. And we worked on many of the same areas, education being the chief among those. And it is so nice to be here on this great campus, this great university, to have the ceremony.

I also want to single out, as the president did, my friend Tom Harkin, a naval aviator who served – we were almost contemporaneous in the Navy, and who represented Iowa for so long and so well in Washington. And then, as a group, the people here on active duty, the midshipmen who will be turning pro in defense of America, the veterans that we have here in the audience and on this – on this campus. And I even want to say a particular welcome to our Army brethren. I haven't had to buy a meal yet in Washington because Navy has beaten Army 13 – (laughter, applause). And good luck to the Cyclones. (Laughter.)

You know, you've heard a lot of the areas for support for our veterans. And a quarter of a million – quarter of million veterans call Iowa home. And you know, you've got this strong naval tradition. You've got this 70-year old, now, Naval ROTC unit. But I think it's still a little strange when the Secretary of the Navy comes to place that's a little ways from the ocean. (Laughter.) But I think that what you're doing shows how important that tradition is, shows how important it is that the states that aren't on the sea are a part of the sea services, because what our Navy and Marine Corps uniquely provide America is presence, around the globe and around the clock.

We are there to deter potential adversaries. We're there to reassure our allies. We're there to provide our nation's leaders with options in times of crisis. We're America's away team. We don't ever get a home game because when we're doing our job we're usually a long, long way from home. And we do that equally in times of war and in times of peace. We're not just at the right place at the right time, we're at the right place all the time. We get on station, faster, we stay longer, we bring everything we need with us, and we don't have to ask anyone permission to get the job done, because we are operating on sovereign U.S. territory in the form of these ships.

Our ability to provide that presence is built on four fundamentals. People, our Sailors and Marines. And we have the best force we have ever had. And these men sitting here today, this is one of the most competitive programs anywhere. It is, I think – and I've had one child already spend a good bit of my money going to an Ivy League school – (laughter) – it's harder to do this than it is to get into the Ivys. Second, our platforms, the numbers of ships and aircraft. Power, how do we fuel those platforms? And partnerships, our strong relationship with our international partners, but most importantly our partnership with the American people.

And that's the reason we have a ceremony like this. You play such a crucial role in the success of the Navy and Marine Corps and the relationship between those who are standing watch, doing the protecting, and those that those Sailors and Marines today are protecting. And if you want to talk about it in economic terms, as governors always want to do, our shipbuilding industry in Iowa contributes more than \$146 million a year to the gross domestic product. You are connected, far from the sea, to our Sailors and Marines, the ships and aircraft around the world.

Now, I have one of the coolest jobs in the world anywhere. I get to name every Navy ship. (Laughter.) That comes with a few downsides. There are way more requests and suggestions than there are ships to name. But from the very beginning of our republic – this office was established in 1798. And from that day, the presidents have honored the strong partnership by naming ships after states and cities and people, an expression of the values that are held in states like Iowa, an expression of our heritage, and an expression of gratitude for what you do every day for our Sailors and Marines.

Now, that special relationship began 110 years ago with the first USS Iowa, BB-4, America's first seagoing battleship. Commissioned in 1897, and saw substantial action during the Spanish-American War. And I'm going to digress just for a second and tell the story up here that I thought about when I was talking to the governor. When I was going through Naval ROTC at Ole Miss I had a close friend – still do, he's still one of my closest friends – maybe not the biggest star that we had as a student, but became a terrific naval aviator, served for five years in the Navy and then for much longer in the reserves.

And one of the things we learned in naval history was that the width of the Panama Canal was determined by the first USS Iowa. They made it two feet wider than the Iowa, which was then our largest ship, so you'd have a one-foot clearance on either side. We got asked that on a test, what determined the width of the Panama Canal? And my buddy remembered it had something to do with Iowa, wasn't sure exactly what. (Laughter.) So he put down it was the width of the main street in Des Moines. (Laughter, applause.) And then he argued partial credit. (Laughter.) It will not surprise you to know he became a very successful lawyer. (Laughter.)

But the USS Iowa that most of us remember was BB-61, lead ship in the Iowa-class battleships, the only ship of its class that served in the Atlantic during World War II. During the war carried Franklin Roosevelt across the Atlantic to meet with Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin. And for that trip, she was outfitted with a bathtub and an elevator. (Laughter.) Then she went to the Pacific in '44, where she participated in invasions and screened aircraft carriers

operating in the Marshalls. She served as 3<sup>rd</sup> Fleet flagship, and she flew Admiral Halsey's flag in Tokyo Bay the day of the surrender. And later, during the Korean War, USS Iowa was involved with raids of the North Korean coast.

That USS Iowa earned nine battle stars for her work in World War II and two for her service in the Korean War. And the reason I walk back through that history is that we're once again naming a ship, the most technologically advanced ship in the world, after Iowa. We build our submarines in an interesting way. Half of each submarine – each submarine – is built in Groton, Connecticut by Electric Boat. Half of each submarine is built in Newport News, Virginia by Huntington Ingalls. And then, when it's time, they put those two halves together to make these submarines. As I said, the most technologically advanced submarine or ship in the world – it's got a mast that has infrared, laser targeting, it has high-resolution cameras, propulsion system is nearly silent, and it's built with open architecture so we can keep up the technology without having to redo the ship.

One other thing unique about this, these cost about \$2 billion a boat. Last summer, the Navy signed the largest single contract in our history to buy 10 of these – 10 over five years. And the contract was for \$18 billion. Now, I was an English major, but nine times two – 10 times two is not 18 billion. Because we bought 10 at a time, because we were able to give stability to those shipyards and to allow them to buy things in economic quantities, we paid for nine and we got 10. So it's like having one of those punch cards – (laughter) – you buy nine subs, you get the 10<sup>th</sup> free. (Laughter.)

And I think that this is an example of how we reverse the decline in the size of the fleet. On 9/11/2001, U.S. Navy's fleet stood at 316 ships. By 2008, after the one of the great military build-ups in our history, we were down to 278 ships. In the five years before I became Secretary, we put 27 ships under contract. That wasn't enough to keep our fleet from getting smaller and it wasn't enough to keep our shipbuilding industry alive.

In my first five years, we have put 70 ships under contract, with a smaller overall top line. And because of those efforts, because of the efforts of people like Tom Harkin in the Senate, because of the support we have gotten from the American people, we're going to return the fleet to more than 300 ships by the end of this decade. And we haven't done it at the expense of aircraft. We've also bought 45 percent more aircraft in those five years than we did in the five years previous.

So the reason for us being here today. It is a – the Navy is full of tradition. It's one of the things we do best. And one of the great traditions is the names of our ships. And so it is my honor and pleasure to officially designate our newest nuclear-powered fast-attack submarine, SSN 797, USS Iowa.

Well, I will end with the last part of this tradition. God bless all those who sail in Iowa. From the Navy, Semper Fortis, Always Courageous. From the Marines, Semper Fidelis, Always Faithful. Thank you.