

Remarks by the Secretary of the Navy
Ray Mabus
USS Washington (SSN 787) Shipnaming Ceremony
Pier 69, Port of Seattle Headquarters
Thursday, 07 February 2013

Lieutenant Commander, thank you so much. And thank you all for being here today. I want to particularly recognize my friend Jay Inslee, the governor here, and his wife Trudi. Congressman Reichert, welcome and thank you so much. You know, I looked out and I can't introduce everybody here. Everybody is important and crucial. The immediate past Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Rick West is in the back. He was incredibly distinguished in that role. So thank you all for being here.

I'm really happy to be in Washington, such a strong Navy partner. Yesterday, I was in Kitsap Bremerton and the Naval Air Station Whidbey Island. I also visited Sailors on the USS Ronald Reagan. And Sailors view this duty as one of the very best places anywhere to be stationed, and I know it's because they receive such great hospitality here. So it is very fitting that we welcome Washington back into our Fleet after a long absence. Today we celebrate that the next Navy nuclear-powered submarine, SSN 787, will be named USS Washington.

The first six ships to bear the name Washington were named after our first president. It wasn't until the beginning of the 20th Century that a ship was named after the state and there has not been a Washington in our fleet since the battleship USS Washington left service after World War II.

I am very happy to correct that today. The new Washington began construction in 2011 and it will be in the fleet in 2016. Virginia-class attack submarines are nuclear powered fast

attack subs, designed to operate in shallow coastal regions while maintaining a capacity for open-ocean anti-submarine warfare.

Like others in her class, USS Washington will be indispensable to the Navy's increased role in our new defense strategy. This focus on the Western Pacific and the Arabian Gulf is a maritime-centric strategy that calls for a global presence using innovative, low-cost, light footprint engagements. USS Washington will answer that call. She will include weapons, sensors, and features that will suit her particularly well for joint operations, including land attack, intelligence gathering, mine countermeasures and supporting special forces.

When I was an officer on the USS Little Rock more than 40 years ago -- and I was there so long ago we didn't even have a designator for Surface Warfare Officer -- I know what submarines called my ship: a target. In fact, one of our jobs on Little Rock was to track submarines until they cheated and went underwater.

During her decades of service, USS Washington may patrol the waters of the Western Pacific to the Northern Atlantic. She can go under the ice in the Arctic. She'll be doing incredibly valued and varied work.

Washington will be put together in Newport News, Virginia at Huntington Ingalls Industries-Newport News Shipbuilding. And elements of her will be constructed there and also in Groton, Connecticut, at Electric Boat.

These attack submarines are a great success story for the Navy and the nation. Virginia-class submarines are being built and delivered under budget and ahead of schedule because the Navy issues multi-year contracts and other smart management practices. Everybody benefits when we work closely with industry partners to keep costs down and productivity up. Taxpayers

get the best value for their money. The industrial base gets predictability and consistency. And the Navy gets the most technologically advanced submarines in the world.

We have achieved this success largely because of our work with industry partners, like those at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility. The work carried out by Puget Sound and is critical for meeting the needs of our combatant commanders. They provide operational and combat ready ships and weapon systems, and perform vital maintenance, modernization and emergency repair work on nuclear-powered subs and aircraft carriers.

In the last four years, I'm happy to say we have turned around navy shipbuilding programs by making shipbuilding a priority, and by using a similar approach to Virginia-class attack subs. The fact is that from 2001 until 2008 during one of the great military buildups in American history, our Navy shrank considerably. On 9/11 2001, we had 316 ships in our fleet and 377,000 Sailors. By 2008, that had shrunk to 278 ships and 49,000 fewer Sailors. In 2008, we built only three ships, not nearly enough to take care of retirements.

At the same time, too many of our shipbuilding programs were, and we're going to use a technical term here, a mess. Ships were being designed while they were being built and the costs were spiraling out of control.

But I'm also happy to say that over the last three and a half years, we've reversed that trend. Since December 2010, we have placed 42 ships under contract and we are on track to get our fleet back to 300 ships by the end of this decade. We have also stabilized our shipbuilding programs. That is a significant accomplishment for the Navy and for America.

That's the good news. Unfortunately, all of this progress could be threatened by the fiscal uncertainty threatening the Navy on two fronts: the mindless, automatic cuts that are a part

of sequestration and the lesser known one that Congress has not passed a budget for this fiscal year, restricting the Navy to last year's programs and funding allowance.

Now, nobody likes budget cuts, but we have already proven we can manage in times of fiscal constraint and still protect our national security. I think we can manage to a new fiscal reality if we are allowed the flexibility we need to adjust in a way that does not sacrifice our safety and our security.

The Navy and Marine Corps are the world's most formidable expeditionary force because we have the flexibility to respond to a range of challenges from high-end conventional warfare to disaster relief. The department needs that same flexibility to manage in these tough fiscal times, to continue to preserve that force and operate forward as America's Away Team now and in the future.

And the USS Washington will be a cornerstone of that future fleet. We are the only service that constructs these incredibly complicated and technologically advanced platforms like Washington that we will rely on for our security for decades to come.

There will be Sailors on Washington who are not yet born, men and women. Three years ago, I announced that women will serve on submarines. We started with ballistic submarines and guided-missile submarines and women are serving on those today and they're deployed on all of those classes. And I very recently announced that the rest of our submarines, all classes of submarines, including the Virginia-class, like the new Washington, will now be open to women. I am pleased that all the services will be looking at opening positions that have previously been closed to women.

The men and women who will serve on board this submarine represent your state and will, in parts of the world, be the only Americans many people will ever see. Your namesake

will ply the waters of the globe, giving others the chance to see what the Navy can do and what Washington means to the Navy and to the country.

Ninety-nine percent of our nation does not serve in the military of our nation. And sometimes there's not enough understanding of what our military can do and what it does.

Seattle and all of Washington state have a unique understanding and appreciation of the men and women who serve. And there is a strong connection between the people of a state and the ship that bears its name. That ship honors the citizens of the state that support our military and it honors the state's veterans who have served their country and represented this state so well.

And I'm going to tell one quick story and then I'll be through. Veterans like Washington-native and Navy Captain Albert Rooks, the commanding officer of USS Houston during World War II serving in the Pacific.

For a three-week period, Captain Rooks and Houston evaded multiple heavy Japanese aerial and surface bombardments until the fifth attack when his ship sustained heavy damage – but it did not sink. Captain Rooks and his crew repaired the ship while they were underway and within three days went on to fight many more battles before he was ordered to return home. For his extraordinary heroism during that period, Albert Rooks was awarded the Medal of Honor, our nation's highest award.

That's the kind of veteran, that's the kind of citizen, that's the kind of character that is here in Washington state, and that's the kind of character that will sail in the new USS Washington.

So, thank you for coming. Thank you for being a part of the life of USS Washington and of our Navy's history. So, in the words that have been spoken so often, God bless USS

Washington and all who sail in her. In the name and the words of the Navy motto, Semper Fortis
– forever courageous.