

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
USS Wichita (LCS 13) Naming Ceremony
City Hall, Wichita, Kansas
Wednesday, September 16, 2015

Thank y'all so much. Mr. Vice Mayor, thank you for welcoming me and the Navy to City Hall. Governor, I particularly want to thank you for being here. Having been a governor, I know what your schedule is like. (Laughter.) And you honor us with your presence. Susan Pompeo, thank you for so ably representing your husband. And please also thank Senator Moran for his representation here today.

And to the citizens of Wichita, Kansas, you know, it's – as the vice mayor said, it's probably not every day that the Secretary of the Navy comes to Kansas. (Laughter.) And it's not the first thing people think of when they think of Kansas. I mean, you think of a lot of wonderful things, but being part of the Navy may not be right at the top of your list.

But let me talk about the Navy and the Marine Corps just for a second, and then come back around to why we're here. What the Navy and Marine Corps uniquely give America is presence, around the globe, around the clock, being in the right place not just at the right time, but all the time. We give our leaders options in times of crisis. We get on station faster, we can stay longer, and we take everything we need with us, and we don't have to ask anybody's permission to get the job done. (Laughter.)

I'll give you an example of that last one. When the decision was made to strike ISIS, we had a carrier launching strikes within 30 hours. And for 54 days – 54 days – we were the only strike option. And it wasn't because we didn't have other aircraft in the region, because we did. It was because the countries where those aircraft were would not allow us to take off armed to strike. We could take off from the George H. W. Bush because it's sovereign American territory.

So our ability to provide that presence is built on four fundamentals – people, our Sailors and Marines; platforms, the ships and aircraft, weapons systems; power, how we fuel those platforms; and partnerships, our strong relationships, as the vice mayor said, with industry, with our international partners, and with the American people. And that last one, the partnership with the American people, is really why I'm here today. Your role in this partnership is so powerful in the success of the Navy and Marine Corps.

And it's so crucial to have that relationship because, as the vice mayor said, I do call the Navy and Marine Corps America's away team. We never had a home game. When we are doing our job, we're usually a long, long way from home. And it's making the connection between the very small number of Americans who serve in uniform, and particularly those who

are forward-deployed, with the people that they stand the watch for, the people that they protect, that we are able to have events like this.

So here, a good way from the ocean, the shipbuilding and repair industry contributes \$126 million annually to Kansas' GDP. And that connects you in a very tangible way to those Sailors and Marines around the world. And since the founding of our country, since the beginning of this office in 1798, my 74 predecessors and I have tried to honor this strong partnership by naming ships after cities and states as a reflection not just of our heritage, but also as an expression of gratitude to you for the support that you've given not only our Sailors and Marines but also our veterans, the 233,000 veterans that call Kansas home. And it's in recognition of that support, it's in recognition of the people from Wichita, the people from Kansas who have raised their hand and volunteered and said, "send me," that we're here today.

And that special relationship began, as the vice mayor said, more than 75 years ago, when a cruiser, the USS Wichita, was commissioned. She was pretty unique blend, New Orleans-class heavy cruiser, with all the accompanying armament and weaponry, but built on a better hull from the Brooklyn-class light cruiser that saw extensive combat experience in World War II. The USS Wichita was assigned to the Atlantic first, supported the amphibious landings in Africa under Operation Torch in November of 1942, before it came into the Pacific. There, she did anti-aircraft defense in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, the Battle of Leyte Gulf, as well as providing fire support for our troops, Marines and Army, as they went ashore in Okinawa. That ship earned a total of 13 battle stars in World War II.

The second USS Wichita was a replenishment ship, AOR-1, commissioned in 1969. And her mission was critical during Vietnam. She provided other ships with the fuel and the ammunition they needed to continue their mission. She made regular deployments to the 7th Fleet area of operations supporting our ships off the coast during that war. Even as an oiler, the second USS Wichita earned four battle stars during Vietnam. So the ships that have been named the Wichita have an incredible legacy, and one which this city, this country and our Navy is incredibly proud of.

And the reason I take you back through history is that the newest type of ship that we have, the most cutting edge technology, is the littoral combat ship that is becoming, and we're renaming it, the fast frigate. It's an innovative ship. It's very big, very shallow draft, very fast. And it's modular. So as technology changes, you pull one weapons system off and you put another one on without having to build a new ship. The first four LCSs were contracted for before 2009. And they cost an average of 548 million [dollars]. We've got 19 more now under contract. And we've gotten the cost to 337 million [dollars] so that we can afford to buy 52 of these ships that we're going to need and that we're going to build.

And these ships represent an example of how we halted and reversed the slide in the size of our fleet. On 9/11/2001, we had 316 ships in the U.S. Navy. By 2008, after one of the great military build-ups in our history, we were down to 278 ships. As the vice mayor pointed out, in the five years before I took office, the Navy put 27 ships under contract – not enough to keep our fleet from getting smaller and not enough to keep our shipyards in business. In my first five years, we put 70 ships under contract, with a smaller top line. And we're going to continue to

grow our fleet so that by the end of this decade we'll be at 306 ships, enough to meet every mission that this country gives us.

And we're able to do that because of the support of Congress, who have been remarkably supportive of our shipbuilding program, and the American people, the people being protected by this great fleet. Now, these ships and this ship will be in the fleet for decades. There will be Sailors on this ship that are not born yet. This ship will go into every ocean of the world, from the Caribbean, to the archipelagos of the Pacific, working with our partners to deter our adversaries and providing that presence.

And because of the littoral combat ship's ability to go into shallow waters that other warships cannot get into, this is often the only ship and the only Americans that a lot of foreigners will ever see. She'll sail the world defending the American people and representing the values of Wichita, the values of Kansas, the values of America around the world. So today I am honored to continue the legacy and announce the name of our newest littoral combat ship, LCS 13, USS Wichita.