

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
USS Charleston Naming
Charleston, South Carolina
Friday, January 9, 2015

General Livingston, thank you so much.

Thank you all for being here and for waiting a little while. It was hard, we were a tad late from Washington. And I want to thank our Medal of Honor recipients and what they have given to this country.

And I want to thank Mayor Joe Riley, my friend, and all the people of Charleston for the support that you have given our Sailors and Marines and veterans. I first met Joe Riley my first year as governor, in 1988. He had already been mayor for 13 years by the time I met him. (Laughter.) And I – you know, I served four years as governor and went on to do other things and 20 years later became Secretary of the Navy, and he's still here. (Laughter.) And how wonderful – how wonderful for Charleston and for all of us that he's been willing to dedicate his life to this great city. So thank you, Joe.

Our naval forces, those that come from the sea, are incredibly flexible and responsive. They provide our country's leaders with any option that they need, regardless of what the crisis or what the situation. Coming from the sea, we get there sooner, we can stay as long as we need to, we bring everything we have to have, and we don't need anybody's permission to be there. Our Navy and the Marine Corps are where it matters, when it matters.

We call this presence. And you see it today all around the world, whether in the skies over Iraq or in the Black Sea or the reaches of the Pacific. This is the thing that the Navy and Marine Corps uniquely give to America, presence. It reassures our allies and it causes our potential adversaries pause.

In order to provide that presence, we've got to have a big enough fleet. On 9/11/2001, the U.S. Navy stood at 316 ships. By 2008, after one of the great military buildups in our history, our fleet was down to 278 ships. In the five years before I took office, the Navy contracted 27 ships – not enough to halt the slide in the size of the fleet and not enough to protect the industrial base. In the first five years I've been secretary, we have put 70 ships under contract with a smaller top line.

And I know we're talking about ships, but I also want to point out we haven't done that at the expense of things like aircraft. We have 40 percent more aircraft in the first five years than we bought in the five years preceding. So our Navy, our fleet, will return to more than 300 ships by the end of this decade. And that's been done by the combined effort of industry, Congress and the people of America. And it has made us safer, because our fleet is stronger.

This great city, Charleston, has played a vital role in the history of our country. From its earliest days one of our nation's most important seaports, all the way through today, where you're home to our Navy nuclear power unit and SPAWAR, this city has had a historic connection with the American Navy.

And I want to take just a moment to talk about my personal connections here. The first time I put on a Navy uniform for real, in the summer of 1969, I reported here, Charleston Navy Base. Stayed in the BOQ that night and the next morning we were driven out to the airfield, got on a plane and went out to meet my ship. So in some ways, I feel like this is full circle. My family and I spend vacations on the Isle of Palms. My brother-in-law was a dentist here. And so many connections with friends, with family, and it is great to be here.

For a generation, Charleston Naval Shipyard built and refitted large portions of our submarine force. And today, Charleston Marine Containers builds vital parts for modules that go in Littoral Combat Ships. And during the Civil War, this harbor was a scene of numerous naval battles, including the attack of the CSS Hunley and the USS Housatonic, the world's first successful submarine attack that sunk a ship. Across on the other side of the harbor, which you can see from here, Patriots Point and the Yorktown, Laffey, and Cragmore. This city continues to honor its Sailors and Marines of yesterday and today.

The name USS Charleston also has a long and distinguished history. The first USS Charleston was 1791. It patrolled the coast of South Carolina against French privateers during the Quasi-War. Since that time, there've been three more. They fought in the Spanish-American War, World War I and World War II. They patrolled our oceans from the period between the Civil War and the Spanish-American War to the height of the Cold War.

Now, the newest type of ship that we're building are the Littoral Combat Ships that I mentioned. They're an innovative kind of ship. They're module, with a very shallow draft, and they're incredibly fast. They go places other ships cannot. And because we're buying a lot of them and because of working with industry, it's become a model program. The costs keep coming down, ship after ship.

These ships are going to be serving our nation for decades, sailing from the nearby waters of the Caribbean to the archipelagos of the Pacific, on patrol, working with our partners and our allies, providing presence. A lot of times, the Sailors on these Littoral Combat Ships will be the only Americans foreigners have ever seen.

And in fact, I just finished reading the new Tom Clancy novel. Although Tom Clancy's gone, his novels continue. (Laughter.) Written by other people. The USS Freedom, our first Littoral Combat Ship, its profile is on the cover. And it's one of the stars of that book. There will be four Littoral Combat Ships forward deployed in Singapore by 2017. There's one there now. The one that's there now, Fort Worth, is today involved in the search of the AirAsia flight.

Since the founding of the Navy, my predecessors have been naming ships for regions and cities and states as a reflection of the greatness of our country. Some of the first frigates that we had – the USS Chesapeake, the USS Essex – were named for places of great naval heritage. Today, in Charleston, I have the honor to follow in that tradition. So standing here, on the edge of this historic harbor, we once again honor the Sailors and Marines who come to the city of Charleston, State of South Carolina, and to honor your support of our Navy and Marine Corps and your naval history. The name of the next Littoral Combat Ship, LCS-18, will be USS Charleston.

I get to do a lot of great things in this job. I get to name ships. It's fun. It's also a responsibility. I do get a lot of suggestions. (Laughter.) I also get to pick the sponsors of these ships.

Being a sponsor is something that goes back literally centuries. A sponsor becomes an honorary member of the ship's first crew, what the Navy calls a plank owner. The sponsor will have a special relationship with this vessel and the men and women who serve aboard. The sponsor is the personal connection between the ship, the Sailors and the city of Charleston. So I'm also announcing that Charlotte Riley will be the sponsor of the USS Charleston. One of the great things about her being the sponsor is that Joe Riley will get to serve a supporting role. (Laughter.) And I know that firsthand, because my wife is a sponsor. And she reminds me that I am not the center of attention around her ship. (Laughter.)

So thank you all. Thank you for being here in celebration of this continuing relationship between the city and the Navy and the ships that bear the city's name. God bless the USS Charleston and all those who will sail in her. They remain, in the words of the Navy motto, *semper fortis*, always courageous; and in the words of the Marine Corps motto, *semper fidelis*, always faithful. Thank you.