

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Naming Celebration for USS Sioux City
Sioux City, Iowa
Saturday, 23 June 2012

Congressman King, Mr. Mayor Pro Tem, citizens of Sioux City, thank you all so much for being patient. We had a little weather that we had to fly around, which was better than flying through. So I appreciate it very much, you all waiting for us and this great turnout on a Saturday morning here.

I am extremely happy to be here to officially announce that one of our newest, most advanced ships, a littoral combat ship, will be named the USS Sioux City. Now, being secretary of the Navy is one of the best jobs you can imagine. One of the great things about it is you get to choose the name for Navy ships. And I chose Sioux City, as Congressman King said, to honor the people of this great city, who have supported and contributed in so many ways to our nation's military. Men and women from this city and from Iowa serve in every branch, and you can find them all over the world. Over the years, 54 citizens of Iowa have received the nation's highest award, the Medal of Honor.

And Congressman King mentioned Iowa native Bud Day, who, as Steve King pointed out, served in almost every branch of the military. He was in Central High School here when the war started, so he joined the Marines – an incredibly good decision - and he served in the Northern Pacific. Then he went to the Army Reserves and returned to active duty in the Air Force and served two tours flying missions over North Korea. But it was in Vietnam that earned him a place as one of our nation's greatest heroes. And you all know the story way better than I do – crashed behind enemy lines, captured, escaped, evaded recapture for 12 days and then imprisoned as a prisoner of war for five years. That is the kind of extraordinary courage in the face of the enemy, that's the kind of character that the people of this city, that Sioux City has exemplified. And that's the kind of character that will sail the USS Sioux City.

One of the things that I look at before I name a ship is, do you have a ship named for you – have you ever had a ship named for you? Sioux City never has. And so I'm very glad to make up for that omission today.

Construction is going to start next June on LCS-11, which will become the USS Sioux City. She's scheduled to get in the fleet in 2016.

Now, the littoral combat ship is going to be a crucial part of the future of our fleet. It's a very fast, modular ship able to operate close to shore and in blue water when it needs to.

The first littoral combat ship, USS Freedom, was deployed over two years early to the Caribbean, and in about three weeks, it seized more than three tons of cocaine. These drug runners, in their fast boats, would see a gray hull on the horizon and just assume they could outrun it. They were wrong.

Because she's modular, we can also change technology as technology changes without having to build a new ship. Right now we've got three mission modules: We've got an anti-surface, an anti-submarine and an anti-mine. But a lot more are in development, and a lot more are on the way. So when the mission changes, all she has to do is pull in and take out one module, you put in another, and she'll be ready to go perform a different mission.

She'll be built not far from here in Marinette, Wisconsin. And Marinette, one of our industry partners, has played an important role in making sure that we can get the LCS and that the American industrial base, the American workforce, remains strong.

We have two variants of the LCS. This variant is built in Marinette. The second is built in Mobile, Alabama. And we wanted both variants. Three years ago when I took office, one of the first decisions I had to make was we bid out three ships. We had two – we had one of each variant in the water, we had one of each variant being constructed, but we bid out three more. And when the bids came back in, they were just unacceptably high. And Congressman King, you know how important it is to get every dollar's worth for our tax money.

My father, who was also a Navy veteran in World War II, was one of the cheapest human beings God ever saw fit. And he was proud of it. I am his son. And so we decided to withdraw the bid, and we told the two competitors, you're going to have to bid against each other, and we're only going to pick one, and we're going to pick it based mainly on the price, and the winner gets 10 ships over five years, and we get a technical package, and we're going to give it to a second yard for nine ships over the same five-year period. You know, I always thought bids would come in and be like 1295, but it's not. These bids are this thick. And over the course of the next year, those bids came down 40 percent.

So the Navy went back to Congress, and they asked if we could buy 10 of each over the next five years. So we got 20 ships instead of 19, and we saved \$2.9 billion doing it. And we kept two shipyards going, keeping the American industrial base going and keeping these high-paid, high-skilled jobs here in America.

We're building them under fixed-price contracts, and the first ship cost way more than the last ship. So every ship that's built is costing less. Because it's your money and while we've got to make sure that we defend this country, we also got to make sure that we do it in the most economical way that we can.

When I took office three years ago – and this is a technical term – too many of our shipbuilding programs were in a mess. But we've stabilized them. We've done it by using things like fixed-price contracts, by putting competition in. On 9/11/2001 our fleet stood at 316 ships, and we had 377,000 Sailors. Eight years later, when I got there, our fleet had dropped to 283 ships, and we had lost almost 49,000 Sailors out of that fleet. And I'm happy to say that we have stabilized the fleet, we've stabilized the number of people that we have, and we're going to grow the fleet to 300 ships by 2019. Since December of 2010 we have put 40 ships under contract, and that compares to three that happened in 2008. This is going to allow us to protect

America. It's going to allow us to protect the workers of America, and it's a significant accomplishment for the Navy, but for America.

So today's ceremony is part of that successful effort to rebuild our fleet. We are keeping the Navy strong, and we're keeping our economy strong by doing it.

The Navy is unique among services in that we build these advanced, high-technology platforms that, as Congressman King said, will be in the fleet for decades. There are going to be Sailors that sail on Sioux City who have not been born yet. And oftentimes those Sailors on Sioux City will be the only people, the only Americans that people from far-off countries will ever meet. And also, as Congressman King pointed out, most Americans, particularly if you live far away from the ocean, don't have enough of a chance to see what the Navy does. And even if you live on the ocean, if we're doing our job, we're not there. We're not in America. We're somewhere far, far away. The Navy and Marine Corps are America's away team, and we do our work far from everybody.

So not enough Americans get to see what the Navy and the Marine Corps do on a day-to-day basis. And one of the ways to correct that is to forge this close bond between a city and the ship that bears its name. And that's why what we're doing here today is so important. That's why it's so important for all of you to be a part of that ship's life; to be in touch with the young men and women who will serve on it; to make sure that when Sioux City goes to sea, it carries part of Sioux City with it, because as important as these platforms are, as important as this technology is, the most important thing we have are Sailors and Marines. And we've got the best force we have ever had.

And I want to thank the veterans in this audience for what you have done to keep us safe, for the sacrifices you have made, not just in the military, but in the police department, the fire department, to make sure that America remains America, to make sure that whatever dangers are met and defeated.

I was in the Navy over 40 years ago, and we had great folks. And I know that whatever branch you served in and whenever you served, you had dedicated, skilled, patriotic people. But I have to tell you, none of us can touch the force we've got today in terms of skill, in terms of dedication, in terms of patriotism.

Fewer than 1 percent of America wears the uniform of America, and so it's important for the people in Sioux City, people all over this country to remain connected to that 1 percent, the 1 percent who protects us all.

So thank you for being here. Thank you for being a part of the life of this ship. Thank you for being a part of the legacy that will soon be forged in steel to support our nation's defense.

In the words of the Navy motto, *semper fortis* – always courageous.

Thank you.