

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Farewell to Under Secretary of the Navy Robert Work
Thursday, March 21, 2013

Bob and Cassandra Work and our distinguished visitors here today.

My enduring memory of Bob Work as Under Secretary of the Navy will be of sitting in my office where we met at least on a daily basis when we were each in town, usually several more times. And Bob being his normal very thorough, very professional self, going through an agenda and then telling me some bizarre story of some decision somebody had made – never anyone in this room -- or some just really stupid something somebody had done out around the fleet. And then he would pause and he'd say, "You know, you just can't make this stuff up."

Well, you know, you just can't make this stuff up about how good Bob Work has been as the Under Secretary of the Navy. You can't make it up to do the job he has done day in and day out.

When I was told I was going to be nominated to be Secretary of the Navy in early 2009, Richard Danzing, the former Secretary of the Navy, called me up and he said, "You're going to get an amazing gift because nominated with you is going to be Bob Work as your Under Secretary." Now, Secretary Danzing knew Bob Work pretty well because Bob had been his military assistant as a Colonel in the Marine Corps. But you know, I wasn't completely happy about that news. And my first response was, "Wait a minute, don't I get a vote in this? Don't I get a say in who the Under Secretary is?" The answer was pretty much, "No, you don't." But Secretary Danzing said, "Trust me. You're going to like this one."

So I came to Washington. Bob and I had breakfast together, which by the way I think is the last time I ever had breakfast in this job. For those of you who don't know, I'm not very good early in the morning. But, sitting there and talking to Bob Work and then going through the nomination process and the briefing process with him as we went through together and had our hearing together, I began to appreciate just how right Richard Danzing had been. What a gift, not just to me, but to the Department of the Navy and to the United States of America.

Bob Work has had an amazing career.

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Coming out of the University of Illinois, getting commissioned in the Marines. Bad eyes kept him from being a pilot, so he went into artillery. And 27 years later, after an incredibly distinguished career as a Marine artillery officer, he retired from the job as the military aid to the Secretary of the Navy. He then went and spent eight years at one of the major think tanks here in Washington. And I think that that's completely appropriate because think tanks are known to

have big brains thinking big thoughts. Bob Work had both of those. And since coming back to the Navy as the Under Secretary he has performed astoundingly well.

As we were going through the nomination process, we talked about what our relationship should be. And he was, as always, an honest broker. He said, "Most of the time, Secretaries give Under Secretaries specific responsibilities." And he said, "And sometimes they don't like each other very much. And sometimes they don't communicate very often."

After going through this nomination process with him, we came up with a different structure. If you look at the organizational chart for the Department of the Navy, the top box has two people in it, the Secretary and the Under Secretary. I wanted somebody who was a Chief Operating Officer. I wanted a true partnership with the Under Secretary of the Navy. And to be really frank, I was advised, "Don't do that because it's going to be a little unclear who's making the decisions. It's going to be a little unclear who's really in charge."

I think it was Ronald Reagan who said, "It's amazing what you can get done when you don't care who gets the credit." And the fact that it has worked as well as it has for the Department of the Navy. The fact that the Department of the Navy, I think, is run as well as any department in our government.

And, so far, and we're getting close to the end of his tenure here, so far I've never managed to stump Bob Work on a program or an issue. And I have tried. He has a broad and deep and comprehensive and empathetic understanding of the Navy and the Marine Corps. It is an understanding born of three and a half decades of living it and working it. And while I have had the opportunity to run big organizations, I have had the opportunity to represent America overseas, I do not have and will never have the depth or breadth of experience, knowledge that he does about our Navy and our Marine Corps. And I think together, this team has proved to be an enduring and, I hope, very successful partnership.

Bob Work holds the job that both Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin Roosevelt held. Now, I would say that Bob Work has set a new standard for being the Under Secretary of the Navy. I don't know if this means, as was true in Franklin Roosevelt's case, that he will be the democratic nominee for Vice President next time. But I'll vote for him if he is.

The other expression that Bob Work uses a good bit is, "We're out of Schlitz." When he first said it, I thought I was the only one old enough to remember that commercial. But to an Under Secretary who has never been out of Schlitz, to an Under Secretary whose job you just can't make up, on behalf of the Navy, the nation and myself – Godspeed, Bob Work.

Thank you.