

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
2<sup>nd</sup> Wounded Warrior Hiring and Support Conference  
Wednesday, 9 November 2011

Thank you so much. Thank you for that kind introduction, and thank you for having me here today.

Juan Garcia, assistant secretary, thank you for your continuing dedication to this incredibly important cause to improve the opportunities for our veterans, and particularly those 12,000 wounded, ill or injured who are transitioning out of our military service.

You know, this has been sort of a nostalgic week for me. Twenty-four years ago yesterday, I was elected governor of Mississippi. And it's been nostalgic for several reasons. One is it's hard to believe it's been 24 years since I've done anything. I have a tough time recognizing the face that looks back at me in the mirror; I still think of myself as that 39-year-old, freshly-minted governor. But I also said yesterday at the Marine Corps birthday celebration, it was a great honor for the people of Mississippi to choose me to lead that state for four years. It's one of the greatest honors you can have if your fellow citizens allow you to do that.

But I have to tell you the greatest honor of my life is leading the United States Navy and Marine Corps and the people who work in it, particularly people that have sacrificed so much like our wounded warriors who have given their all for us. And all they're asking for is a fair chance to put their lives back together.

It's the second time we've had this conference. And I appreciate your leadership, everybody here, in guaranteeing that the Department of the Navy focuses on our most important asset with our people.

I want you to listen to a quote with me just for a second. "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation." I want to read that again. "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation." That sounds very, very current, very, very on-point. That was George Washington that said that during the American Revolution. Nothing has changed. Nothing has changed in the requirement that we treat our veterans, and particularly our wounded veterans, with the respect, but also the encouragement and justice that they deserve.

The Department of the Navy takes very seriously this effort to put our wounded warriors to work. It's the right thing to do, and more than that, it's a sacred duty.

We also know that the organizations represented here today will be better off with our veterans on your team. You already know this but veterans are highly qualified, incredibly

talented individuals with a lot of specialized skills and the ability to learn new skills very quickly and very well. They are flexible, they are experienced, and they have proven they're not afraid to work hard.

Our wounded veterans can add to this already impressive list of attributes that all our veterans have because they have overcome the adversity. They've overcome the adversity that they faced when they were wounded or injured as a result of their service.

These veterans are wounded, they are not damaged. Every injured Sailor or Marine that I've ever visited has focused on getting back either to the service or to doing something productive.

I'll tell you a couple of quick stories. Chief Jimmy Hatch, a Navy SEAL, shot through the knee. I was going up to Bethesda to give him a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart. He said a word to me; he said he just wanted me to know that he was running toward the enemy when he got shot, not away. And when I got out there – Chief Hatch has gone through over 30 surgeries now on his knee – and when I got out of there, he had all sorts of stuff sticking out of his knee and his leg, he insisted on standing up for the medal ceremony. I told him to sit down and he said, I will not sit down while you are here, sir. That's the sort of commitment, that's the sort of dedication and discipline that you're looking at with our wounded veterans.

My friend Max Cleland, a triple amputee, Vietnam, went on to serve Georgia as its secretary of state and a United States senator and serve America as its secretary of veterans affairs.

These two wounded veterans represent the quality of the individuals that we're talking about here today. We're trying to make sure they have good jobs, and more than that, have good careers. Those who have served their country honorably and recovered from the wounds that they have suffered are eager to continue, to contribute, and find ways to serve.

Unfortunately, in these troubling economic times, sometimes they find themselves disadvantaged looking for jobs. In the Department of the Navy, we're in a position to address some of these challenges – not only to provide training to make our veterans more employable, but by providing opportunities for employment of those wounded warriors. In fact the Department of the Navy has led in hiring wounded warriors. In fiscal years '10 and '11, the Department of the Navy has hired well over a thousand veterans who receive 30 percent or greater disability rating connected to their service. NAVSEA, Naval Sea Systems Command – Admiral Kevin McCoy here – exceeded its goal this year. Its goal, which was a great goal, was to hire one Wounded Warrior a day for the whole year. They did way better than that. They hired 509 Wounded Warriors last year.

The Navy Acquisition Development Program, Wounded Warrior, is available to any Wounded Warrior at the GS-7 level, and this year we're expanding to allow entry at the GS-5 level. This expansion gives increased employment opportunities to the Wounded Warriors who may not have received an advanced degree.

Department of the Navy has also streamlined the Wounded Warrior hiring process. We put 20 employment coordinators out around the country to provide assistance to Wounded Warriors looking for careers in either the Department of the Navy or in the federal civil service.

Other departments that are represented here, like the Department of Veterans Affairs, offer things like paid internships or subsidies, among other hiring tools. You're going to learn about a lot of these, and a lot of you know about these already and other programs that the federal government is undertaking to make sure that we treat our Wounded Warriors the way we should. That's why this conference is such a valuable resource.

And I know that you're all aware that the President has just issued three executive orders aimed at putting veterans back to work. The President understands how important it is to put America back to work, but veterans are experiencing a tougher entry into the job market than most. The unemployment rate for veterans is higher than for nonveterans. So through an executive action, President Obama will make available a new online service to help veterans find work, create a veterans job bank and a veterans gold card granting them more tailored assistance at career centers.

But specifically for wounded warriors, the President has offered, as part of his American Jobs Act, the Wounded Warrior Tax Credit, which provides firms that hire veterans with service-connected disabilities a credit of up to \$9,600 per veteran. I know you're here today because you're committed to helping our wounded veterans get back to work. This tax credit may not be the deciding factor for anybody in this room, but it may be for people who aren't in this room, for others who are willing to consider hiring a Wounded Warrior if the tax credit's available. It's entirely proper. It's the right thing to do, particularly as Veterans Day approaches, and I'm really encouraged and pleased by the progress that Congress is making on this specific thing.

Now on Veterans Day, Friday, 11/11/11, President Obama's going to join 7,000 Sailors and Marines and fans and me at the first-ever Carrier Classic. We're going to go out to San Diego and have a regular season basketball game between the University of North Carolina Tar Heels and the Michigan State Spartans on the flight deck of the USS Carl Vinson – the first time this has ever happened.

And it's an opportunity to do a bunch of things. One, it's an opportunity to show the professionalism and competence and skill and dedication of Sailors and Marines who serve on the Carl Vinson, but also the men and women who serve all across our military: Navy, Marine Corps, and our sister services, the Army, the Air Force, the Coast Guard.

When I first heard about the Carrier Classic, one of the things I thought about was all the trips I'd made in theater and to our deployed forces all around the world. Because on any given day, 40 percent or more of our ships are deployed and more than 50 percent of our fleet is at sea. And when you talk to [deployed service members], they will tell you how important sports are; how important just the connection to family and home is. It is easy to get in conversation about how the football team that you're rooting for has stunk all year - I'm an Ole Miss graduate, I know– or how the basketball team, that they watch on the Armed Forces Network, is doing well. It's a way to connect the people who are protecting us with the people being protected, and to

thank them on Veterans Day for all the sacrifices they and their families have made and are continuing to make.

It's also a chance to put a spotlight on one of the Navy's most powerful teams in diplomacy and power projection. The carriers that we have like the Carl Vinson are essential to the Navy's global reach and persistent presence. They allow us to do everything from high-end warfare, to counterinsurgency, to humanitarian assistance, to disaster relief, all without putting a single person on the ground, all without taking over one inch of anybody else's territory. In fact, Carl Vinson was the first ship on station off Haiti when the earthquake there occurred. She went on after that to conduct air operations over Afghanistan. And not long after the Carrier Classic, our Vinson will once again deploy and take its place with our forward-deployed ships and people anywhere in the far reaches of the Earth.

The Carl Vinson has, like all our ships, an incredibly confident and dedicated crew. That's true across the Navy and the Marine Corps and the military. This is the finest force that we have ever had, and our wounded warriors are an integral part of that force.

I know that you're going to make the most of this conference. And I hope that you'll share some of your experiences, because the people in this room have already done a lot in terms of hiring a wounded warrior.

We have to take care of our people. We have to expand our services. We have to expand our assistance to the men and women who fought for our country, for our freedoms, as they are fighting for their livelihoods.

Max Cleland's biography was called *Strong at the Broken Places*. Our wounded warriors aren't just strong at the broken places; they have made our country stronger. And they will make your organization stronger, too.

Thank you all very much.