

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Jackson State University
Hamer Institute
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Dr. McLemore, thank you for that introduction. Thank you so much. Dr. McLemore, who I've known for years and who gets me to Jackson State more than any other university in this country, has introduced a lot of special people here today, and looking out over this audience I am not going to attempt to do what I am tempted to do which is – I see so many friends – but I am going to pick out a couple. When I was Governor of Mississippi and William Winter use to call, my secretary would buzz into the office and say, “the real Governor is on the phone.” And to Harvey Johnson who was one of my appointees as Governor and has made us such a fine Mayor, welcome. And just as a small point of personal privilege, I want to introduce my daughter Elizabeth Mabus who came down from school; she's cut school almost all week to be with me. I had the amazing experience Tuesday night of being on the Daily Show - the most trusted name in fake news. But I hope you'll forgive me today for smiling so much because I don't get home much and I'm so happy when I do get here.

Fannie Lou Hammer said, “Nobody's free until everybody's free” and that statement is as relevant today as the day she said it in the 1960's. The cause for civil rights in this country, for equal treatment under the law, for equal treatment in education – those struggles are not over, they continue. But because of Fannie Lou Hamer, and those with her, and those who followed her and came before her, we have come so far. In 2009, we look out at America and see a nation that almost a year ago elected a historic

African-American President 45 years after the Civil Rights Act. But the distinction that's important in my mind is that President Obama was not elected as an African-American, he was elected as an American. The struggle for civil rights is not over, but look at how far we've come – Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream that this nation would "...rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed" is coming true. "These truths [are] self-evident, all men are created equal." The content of one's character does matter more than the color of his skin. Mrs. Hamer would be proud.

As a nation, we have come far in the last nine months in how we deal with the world at large and how we Americans are perceived abroad. And there doesn't get much better proof, for our President, after nine months in office, to get the Nobel Peace Prize. President Obama has put a new face on American foreign policy. His commitment to engaging the world as a partner has ushered in a sea-change in the way in which the United States is viewed and they that we're dealt with around the world. This President has spoken all around the world – in Cairo, Port-of-Spain, Ankara, Moscow, and in each place his presence and his words have challenged the typical "reflexive anti-Americanism" that's grown too prevalent in recent years.

Our issues as nations are shared. I'm talking now as the Secretary of the Navy, this is particularly true at sea where nations are united by common cause. The ocean connects us all, sustains us all, and for centuries we, a maritime nation, have used it as the foundation of commerce and economic growth. For the Navy, this gives us an opportunity to meet the President's policy of engagement by joining with other countries to address issues of global maritime concern.

The Navy is already doing this and has been doing it for 234 years. Next Tuesday it will be 235 years since the United States Navy was founded. I know you've all read, watched, heard of the counter-piracy task force that we've got sailing the Horn of Africa in the Gulf of Aden – and the rescue of Captain Phillips of the *MAERSK ALABAMA* by SEALS working off U.S. Navy destroyer *BAINBRIDGE*. Last week thirty countries and international organizations met with shipping folks in Bahrain to formalize an international strategy against piracy. Increased vigilance and the multi-national effort have reduced the success rate of pirate attacks dramatically; there have been only 6 since May.

We're also working with other countries to build security capacity and response to natural disasters. The United States Navy deploys on missions like the Africa Partnership Station, where we send a ship to train and work with nations in the Gulf of Guinea, and medical deployments like the USNS *COMFORT*'s, a hospital ship, to South America visibly demonstrate American commitment to the rest of the world. It is these multi-national security and humanitarian operations that lead to greater partnership and engagement around the world.

And that's one of the main reasons we need and have to have a Navy and Marine Corps. The Navy and Marine Corps have always have been an expeditionary force that can do a lot of missions, from ballistic missile defense, to counter-piracy, and counter-terrorism, to security assistance, humanitarian relief, and disaster response.

We are scalable, we carry our own guns and supplies with us, and we don't have to infringe on anybody's sovereignty to do the job and we use the ocean as our base.

But we can be better. The Department of the Navy and I have an obligation to look at what the world will be like in twenty years and develop an agile and flexible Navy and Marine Corps that have the right tools to meet what today are completely unknown challenges. We also have an obligation to serve as a trusted custodian of the taxpayers' dollars and as a steward to our environment.

I am committed as Secretary to addressing climate change and energy consumption in the Navy. The Department of Defense uses 93 percent of the federal government's energy, and 2 percent of all the energy America uses. We are going to change the way we do business, and we are going to change the Navy in the process. We are taking a lot of steps – we're going to make our ships and our planes and our systems more efficient. We are developing alternative fuels like biofuels developed from algae, camelina, or cellulose that can be grown and developed from things right here in Mississippi. And we are investing in our infrastructure to buy things like electric vehicles and reconfigure our bases to take advantage of solar power, wind, and ocean energy. I don't want the Navy and Marine Corps to follow other people in energy reform, I want us to lead the nation.

When you address the future of the Navy, it also includes developing the right ships, the right platforms for our Sailors to use in the future. We are working on new aircraft like the Joint Strike Fighter, unmanned aerial and seaborne and undersea systems, and we are commissioning new ships, like the Littoral Combat Ship and our new *Lewis and Clark* fleet cargo and ammo ships.

It is on this last ship that I'm going to spend a little time. One of the best things I get to do as Secretary of the Navy is I get to name every single ship we build for the fleet. And I get to announce here my very first selection – the first ship I'm naming. The thirteenth ship of the T-AKE *Lewis and Clark* Class, T-AKE 13. I'm also going to introduce the ship's sponsor. A ship's sponsor has a very important role in naval tradition. The ship's sponsor is the person who christens the ship, breaks the champagne across the bow. The sponsor and the sponsor's family keeps up with that ship as long as that ship is in the fleet of the United States.

These ships these, these T-AKEs, are the glue that hold our fleet together. They carry 887,000 cubic feet of ammunition, stores, food, repair parts and over a million gallons of fuel. They've undertaken a full gamut of operations for our Navy. The *LEWIS AND CLARK* (T-AKE 1) earlier this year served as an Afloat Forward Staging Base for Combined Task Force 151, the coalition force that's responsible for the anti-piracy operations off Somalia. The *RICHARD E. BYRD* (T-AKE 4) recently completed Pacific Partnership 2009, and it brought medical, dental, veterinary, and civil engineering services to Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, the Solomons, and the Marshalls where the embarked teams on *RICHARD E. BYRD* treated over 11,000 medical and 4,400 dental patients. And the *ROBERT E. PEARY* (T-AKE 5) provided humanitarian assistance to the Northern Marianas in September after super typhoon Choi-Wan ravaged the islands of Agrihan and Alamagan. The ships, like our Navy at large, are forward deployed and do these missions every day.

These ships are named for American pioneers, American explorers, and American visionaries. They celebrate the dreams and inquisitive nature that is representative of the

American spirit. These are men and women who have “dreamed things that never were”. Those honored by the 12 ships named so far have included polar explorers, aviators, naval heroes, a doctor, and a physicist. They represent the rich tapestry that is America.

In looking at their examples, we are allowed to touch something indefinable. We are allowed to touch what is the very best in all of us.

The man honored today carried on this proud tradition, and he is no stranger to Jackson. Born in Decatur, Mississippi, he enlisted in the Army and fought in France. After the war, he became involved in civil rights activism. While serving with the Regional Council for Negro Leadership – he organized a boycott of segregated gas stations. Rising in the civil rights movement, he became the Mississippi Field Secretary for the NAACP. This man was committed to Jackson and committed to Mississippi, and most importantly, he was committed to his fellow human beings and the dream of making the America a nation for all its citizens.

It is my honor to name the thirteenth ship of this class for a civil rights pioneer, a tireless visionary who demanded justice and saw in Mississippi what might be, not what was at that time; a man whose cold-blooded assassination galvanized a movement and fueled the drive to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In this, like so many other American heroes, he gave his life for his country. This man once said “You can kill a man, but you can’t kill an idea”. Today, standing here in the Hamer Institute, we see just how right he was.

So help me welcome the United States Navy’s newest ship sponsor, Myrlie Evers. And help me welcome to the fleet the newest Navy ship – the USNS *MEDGAR EVERS*.