Thank you Ellen [Roughead], and thank you all for everything you do for our Sailors, Marines and military families. As we speak, the men and women of the Navy Marines Corps Team continue the watch around the world and around the clock, buoyed by the dedicated support and spirit of the remarkable women in this room.

The moment you accepted the challenge of sponsorship, you became an important part of the family that makes up US Navy ship. You’ve been there for the skilled shipyard workers who designed and built your ship. You’ve been there for the dedicated Sailors and Marines who operate and maintain it out in the fleet. And you’ve been there for the faithful families who continue the watch at home.

I’ve always maintained that people are our most important resource. And you are that link in the chain that joins all of the people - civilian and military – who power our ships through the full cycle of service. So I appreciate everything you’ve done, and continue to do, for the people of the ships that bear your spirit beyond the curve of the earth.

The challenges those ships and their crews confront today are significant. The National Defense Strategy recognizes that we face a security environment more complex and volatile than any we’ve experienced in recent memory. And we cannot answer this challenge under the banner of “business as usual”.
The foundation for restoring readiness and increasing lethality has been set, but now we must build on that foundation. We must be accountable for how and where we invest, and we must understand the capabilities we gain from those investments.

The most significant investment we make as a force are, of course, our ships. The American taxpayers provide us with their hard-earned treasure, and trust us to protect them from a dangerous world. We owe it to them to ensure that every dollar is invested in the most effective manner possible to fulfill our sacred oath.

So when we make decisions regarding the procurement of additional platforms, we go through a rigorous process to ensure we’re maximizing the benefit of the acquisition on readiness and lethality as a force.

Part of this process involves the selection of a name for the proposed ship or submarine. Congress has authorized the Secretary of the Navy to select names, a responsibility I take very seriously, as it represents one of the most tangible signals to the world of the values we hold and the people and places we honor as a nation.

For example, our Virginia Class Attack Submarines are named for States, honoring the unique history and legacy of each of our United States. Littoral Combat Ships like the USS Charleston and the future USS Augusta are named for American communities, recognizing that the story of service and sacrifice extends to every neighborhood.
Destroyers, like the USS Thomas Hudner and USS John McCain, honor distinguished leaders in Naval history, while tankers like the USS John Lewis remember civilians who fought for human rights, and cargo ships like the USS Lewis and Clark recognize those who pushed the boundaries of discovery.

Every naming decision presents a new opportunity to broaden our perspective on the American experience and educate our children on the contributions of all of our people. That’s why it was my honor in March to announce that the new class of Towing, Salvage, and Rescue ships will be named in honor of Native American nations, starting with the USNS Navajo.

But names are only part of the spirit we impart to our ships and submarines as we go from procurement to construction to christening and commission. The other important decision we make is the selection of a sponsor. All of you were chosen because of your deep connections to the namesake of a vessel, and our faith in your ability to impart that connection to the crew and serve as a guiding and comforting force as they serve.

A city name becomes more than a spot on the map when one of its leading citizens lends her time to the ship it was named for. The mother, sister, wife or daughter of an honored Sailor or Marine can remind those who serve today of the proud legacy they inherit and the responsibility they hold. A community becomes real to the crew serving under its name when an honored member joins her initials to the keel, and her name to the plankowner manifest.
I don’t need to tell you that the role of a sponsor extends well beyond a shattered bottle on a single day, nor does it end when you ask the recently minted ship’s Captain to bring your ship to life. Your presence today and active involvement in this organization demonstrates that you understand this to your core. You support our people. And our people are our force.

From that first meeting at the Willard Hotel over a century ago, to this inspiring gathering today, the Society of Sponsors has stood as a pillar of strength for the Navy-Marine Corps Team and the United States of America. So it is an honor to stand with you, and thank you once again for your unwavering support of the world’s finest Sailors and Marines.