

Remarks by USS Colorado Committee Chairman, John Mackin

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, and Members of the Committee

As a 26-year, nuclear submarine officer and now, since retiring from the Navy, a 22-year resident of Colorado, I am extremely excited and very proud to have a submarine named Colorado.

It is indeed, a great honor to the state, and to all the citizens of Colorado, to have such a great ship with the name of our state, and it calls to mind the great traditions of the USS Colorado's that have gone before. I will speak more to that in a moment.

The christening and commissioning of a Naval vessel is an important event with traditions going back centuries. In recent years, especially with ships named after cities and states, it has become a cause of great celebration for the namesake constituencies. The Commissioning ceremony itself is a Navy ceremony which the federal government will pay. But there are several, traditional activities that surround that ceremony which celebrate this achievement, and honors the hard work of the crew, and those activities are the responsibility of the Commissioning Committee. It is our task to organize and fund these events.

To that end, we have first sought to raise awareness within the state. Our initial effort was the conduct of a contest to design the ship's crest. We had about 140 entries, mostly from Colorado, but from other states, and internationally, as well. After the ship informed me of the winning design to be used as their Crest, I noted winner had an address in New York. My initial disappointment that the winner was not from Colorado, was quickly dispelled, however, when I learned that he was a native of Arvada, Colorado, and after graduating from graduated from High School here, enlisted in the Navy, was quickly selected for an officer program, sent to college, commissioned an officer in the Navy and was then at a navy training facility in New York, learning to become a nuclear qualified officer. Subsequently, Lieutenant Junior Grade Mike Nielsen received orders to COLORADO and is a now member of the commissioning crew. [His proud parents are with us here today]

We have also organized seven trips to the state by crew members in groups of three or four. The Navy paid for one of those, but the Committee has funded the rest. We have taken the sailors out to visit schools, visit government officials, talk to the media and to see the beauty of Colorado.

During the seven visits, some 25 crew members have spent over 20 days in the state, visited over 10 schools, visited Pikes peak, Garden of the Gods, Air Force Academy, Red Rocks, the State Capitol, University Memorial Center at CU Boulder and ran in the Bolder Boulder. They

have visited the cities of Longmont, Loveland, Estes Park, Pueblo, Colorado Springs, Vail and more. They have attended Broncos games, Broncos training camp, Rockies, Avalanche, Rapids and Outlaws games.

We want the sailors of SSN 788 to understand what a great state they represent, but more than that, to have Coloradans meet these fine young sailors. It is so great to see the interaction that we have had between them. I think all who have met these sailors have been impressed with their poise, their expertise, and their dedication to their job and the nation.

I wish more Coloradans could meet these crew members to see the high caliber of sailors that help defend our freedom.

As a land-locked state, Coloradoans are much more familiar with our Army, and our Air Force, than with our Navy. I think this has been a challenge for our Committee. But there is a long history of previous USS Colorado's service, in the Navy, that many are not aware of. SSN 788 will be the fourth ship to bear the name Colorado.

The first USS Colorado, named after the Colorado River, was a three-masted steam screw frigate commissioned in 1858. She saw action in the Civil War, blockading the Confederacy. In 1871, while operating off the coast of Korea, her squadron was attacked by shore batteries from forts on the Korean peninsula and, in a retaliatory raid, eight sailors and marines from COLORADO were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions.

The second USS Colorado was a Pennsylvania-class armored cruiser commissioned in 1905. She was renamed USS Pueblo in 1916 to free up the name for the Battleship. During World War I, she saw service in the South Atlantic and then later escorted convoys to Europe.

The third USS Colorado, BB-45, was commissioned in 1923. She saw extensive action during the Second World War earning seven battle stars. She participated in invasions of Tarawa, Kwajalein, Eniwetok, Leyte Gulf, Saipan, Tinian, Luzon and Okinawa. She was hit by two Kamakazis, hit by shells from Japanese shore batteries, and also hit by friendly fire. She lost 77 men, with 388 wounded, in these actions. She was tied up to USS Missouri, in Tokyo Bay, for the signing of the surrender of Japan.

This is the heritage of ships named Colorado.

Ten surviving members of the Battleship Colorado crew attended the submarine's Christening in December in Connecticut. It was so very heartwarming to see them tell such vivid stories of their experiences, like it was yesterday, to the current crew members and pass on their strong tradition of naval service

On behalf of them, one of the crewmembers, Ken Jones, issued the following challenge:

“As a representative of the crew of USS Colorado, BB-45, we challenge the crew of SSN-788 to wear the name with dignity, wear the name with honor, and wear the name with pride. And we hope that all of your voyages will be totally successful. We pray that you never have to fire your weapons in anger, but if you do, be ready, and prepared to give them hell.”

We seek to support this crew not only for this commissioning but also throughout the 33-year life of the boat, and establish a long-term relationship with our state. We want this crew, and all future crews, to understand that the citizens of Colorado are behind them and we are proud of them and respect the everyday sacrifices which they make on our behalf.

In addition to funding the events of Commissioning week, and the trips of USS Colorado sailors to the state, the Committee is also looking to enhance the submarine to make it just a little bit better for the sailors when they go to sea, and to give the boat a distinctive character of Colorado. The famed Colorado landscape photographer, John Fielder, has generously donated some of his photography, and the Committee will pay for its installation as a panorama in the crew’s mess. We will decorate the tables in the mess with Colorado maps and other Colorado items, including the Ship’s Crest that was signed by the legislature in the last session.

We also hope to provide upgraded exercise equipment for the crew to use at sea. We will create a plaque with the Ken Jones quote that I just cited to be permanently mounted in the boat for all to see.

It is also our intention to bring a taste of Colorado to the events surrounding Commissioning. We want to use these events as a platform to showcase our state and its products. We want to make Colorado shine on a national stage. Taking a cue from the USS Illinois commissioning in October, we hope to have a reception on the pier afterwards featuring Colorado based food and beverage.

We have many great supporters with us so far.

We are grateful to all of them, in particular, our presenting sponsor, MDC Richmond American Foundation who is the premier contributor to our campaign. Left Hand Brewing produced a special beer for USS Colorado and donated the proceeds to our cause. Balistreri Vineyards made the special sparkling wine for the Christening, and has supplied wines for many of our events.

Support by states is not without precedent. Other states have contributed to their namesake ships. New Mexico appropriated \$300,000 prior to USS New Mexico Commissioning and more

since. North Dakota \$200,000 and South Dakota, which is a year behind COLORADO in the construction process, has already appropriated \$100,000.

I would like to say a few more words about the crew and what they do.

I am often asked, mostly by Air Force friends of mine, what the crew does during the construction period. The first major increment of the crew, sailors from the Engineering Department, reported to the shipyard in October of 2014. Even though the boat was still in pieces, still being assembled, and not at sea, this assignment is perhaps one of the most challenging a submarine sailor can have. The sailors must train and certify on all the complex systems throughout the boat. For many this is their first submarine and for others, while they may have been on previous submarines, they may not have qualified on this class of boat. As the shipyard completes each of the many complex systems that go into this boat, it is up to the crew to operate and test these systems and accept them as ready to go to sea for the first time. The certification process for the nuclear propulsion plant is especially complex and demanding. The non-nuclear components of the propulsion system are first operated on shore steam for extensive periods, prior to the reactor coming on line. This requires several weeks of around the clock, 27 – 7, shift work by the engineers.

Right now, the crew is preparing for a major examination given by personnel from the Navy's Naval Reactors staff in Washington DC, to ensure they are prepared to take the reactor critical for the first time. Once the reactor is critical, there will again be several weeks of 24 – 7 operations to certify that the integrated propulsion plant is ready for sea. It is an awesome responsibility that falls on this crew to get this complex, and technologically advanced, ship ready to go to sea and submerge to the depths for the first time.

Additionally, during the construction period, many of the crew, especially those who have not been to sea before, are sent out on other submarines to augment those crews and to gain experience in submarine operations to work towards their own Qualification in Submarines.

It is these sailors that I want to celebrate – for after the boat is in commission and when they deploy:

- They will live in confined spaces for up to two months at a time, without seeing the sun or breathing fresh air, or feeling a warm breeze
- They will have little contact with their families
- They will carry out undersea missions which they will not be able to tell us or their families, about.
- When they go out on a long deployment they will be walking on canned goods, the overflow from the stores room, until they eat their way through.

- Some will have to hot-bunk, that is share a bunk with others, since there are not enough bunks for all
- This is the life they have chosen. They do it willingly. They will do that to help keep America free to help protect us, those of us here back home.

In short, we would like this tangible support by State of Colorado for this once in a lifetime event in order to:

- Celebrate the great achievement of this ship
- Celebrate this honor to our state and make Colorado proud
- Celebrate the heritage of previous USS Colorado's and honor their service
- Show support for our military and the navy
- Honor the hard work of the crew now, and as they sail the oceans in our name.

During its 33-year life span, USS Colorado will sail all the oceans of the world. They will visit many foreign ports and interact with people of foreign lands, carrying the name Colorado. The crew will represent us well across the globe. Let us show our support for them now, and throughout the life of the boat.