

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
USS Colorado (SSN 788) Christening Ceremony
General Dynamics Electric Boat Shipyard
Groton, Connecticut
Saturday, December 3, 2016

Thanks, Mike Jabaley, a fellow Mississippian, whose parents are some of my close friends from Jackson.

To the distinguished guests on the platform, and to all the friends of Electric Boat, of the USS Colorado, who have come here today; and most particularly to my daughter; as has been mentioned, this is my final christening. And I could not have picked a better boat, a better place, a better person to celebrate this final christening. It has been my high privilege and great honor to lead the United States Navy and Marine Corps. And I want to particularly thank those I have served with, started with senators and congressmen, and governors, and particularly the Sailors and Marines who I have traveled with, been with, and served with. Your success, your continued efforts, ensure that we maintain not only the greatest navy in the world today, but the greatest navy the world has ever seen.

When our Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution, they said that Congress had the ability to raise an army when needed, but Congress had the responsibility to maintain a navy. That makes the Navy unique. That makes the Navy the everyday, day-in and day-out protector of the great freedoms we enjoy.

We provide presence around the globe, around the clock. We provide our leaders with options in times of crisis. We are America's away team, because Sailors and Marines, equally in times of peace and times of war, are not just in the right place at the right time, they're in the right place all the time. We get on station faster, we stay longer, we bring everything we need with us. And, because we're operating from sovereign U.S. territory like the Colorado, we can do whatever needs to be done without seeking any other nation's permission.

When it comes to ships, quantity has a quality all its own. Here in Groton, here in Connecticut and Quonset across in Rhode Island, in Newport News, and around the country, thousands and thousands of extraordinarily skilled shipbuilders have constructed Colorado and our growing fleet, and bringing to life the most advanced submarine in the world. No one builds better ships – no one builds better warships that the United States of America – no one.

It's been mentioned here before, but in 2001 our fleet had 316 ships. Seven years later, in spite of one of the big military buildups in our history, we were down to 278 ships. In those seven years, the Navy put 41 ships under contract. Now, 41 ships wasn't enough to keep our Navy from continuing to shrink, and it wasn't enough to keep great shipyards like this in

business. In the past seven fiscal years that I have had the privilege of having this job, we have put 86 ships under contract.

We are growing the fleet. We will get back to 300 ships by 2019. We will get back to our assessed need of today of 308 ships by 2021. And we've done it with the incredible assistance of the people on this platform, from Congress, and from industry. It's been things like fixed-price contracts and multi-years and block buys. It's been the work of Electric Boat and Huntington Ingalls, the skill of the shipbuilders. We need a lot of ships. We need a lot of these submarines. We do command the undersea. But in order to continue to do that, we have to have at least, two-sub Joe Courtney, two subs a year.

And as has also been mentioned here today by Admiral Jabaley and several others, we signed the biggest contract in naval history in 2014 – \$18 billion almost – to get 10 Virginia-class attack submarines over five years. Now, this is math in public, but these submarines cost \$2 billion each. We paid 18 billion (dollars). We paid for nine; we got 10. It's a little bit like having one of those punch cards: buy nine submarines, get your 10th one free. (Laughter.)

The USS Colorado is an example, and a wonderful example, of the technology, of the workmanship, of the skill, of the complexity that it takes to build one of these warships. But although that technology does give our Sailors a huge advantage and ensures that they will never go into that fair fight, the real strength, the real edge, as I said at the keel-laying, is not the technology. It's not the wires and the steel. It's the people. It's the Sailors who will crew the Colorado. They are the rightful heirs to the Sailors who crewed the USS Colorado in World War II. And to you who were on the last Colorado, Bravo Zulu, well done.

We expect our Sailors day in and day out to do the hardest jobs in the world, and to do them well. And they do so without fail. In March, I got underway on the USS Hampton for five days under the Arctic ice. We surfaced at the North Pole. It was the longest underway I've had in this job. And when I came back, I was talking to our Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral John Richardson, who's a submariner. And I was pretty full of myself, and I told him I'd just gotten back from five days underway. And he thought for a minute and he said, well, I figured out I've spent 12 years of my life underwater. (Laughter.)

Now, think about it. The Sailors you see here today for years to come, aboard Colorado and others of our submarines, will be spending years of their lives unseen. You won't know about it, but they will be there standing the watch. They will be there protecting us. They will be there when their families are back here celebrating birthdays and holidays. They will be there on our behalf. Bravo Zulu to you, the Sailors of today.

It is also one of my great privileges to name all our ships. And one of the things I think is important is to make that connection between the American people. And I think it's particularly important, as has been mentioned, to connect the Navy to states like Colorado, which may be a little ways from the sea. (Laughter.) Colorado has given us Sailors and Marines and Soldiers and Airmen and Coast Guardsmen for years. The citizens of Colorado have given their sons and daughters in the defense of this country. And that name should be out around the world telling the story of Colorado.

The last Colorado, as you've heard, was commissioned in 1923, but went on to earn seven Battle Stars in the Pacific – Tarawa, Marshall Islands, Marianas, the Philippines, Okinawa. And after the war, she was assigned to Magic Carpet duty and brought more than 6,000 veterans home to their families. And now, almost 70 years since the last Colorado was decommissioned, it's time. It's time to have another Colorado, to have a submarine which will carry the legacy and the patriotism of the state of Colorado for decades to come. She and her crew will carry the American spirit, will carry the name Colorado worldwide. A lot of times Sailors aboard these ships are the only Americans people from outside this country will ever meet, and they're great at that job as well.

In addition to a great name, every ship has a sponsor who imbues that ship with her personality, her energy, her drive, and the personality of the state for which it's named. The sponsor stays in touch with the ship throughout the life of that ship and becomes an honorary crew member. Now, as I said at the keel-laying, I have a little bias, but Colorado, you're getting a great sponsor.

Annie was born prematurely – the only time a Mabus has ever been early for anything. (Laughter.) But even as a preemie, you could see her determination. And she has grown up to be compassionate, funny, idealistic, optimistic. Annie makes friends with everyone she meets and wherever she goes, and there's a testament of that here today. More than 30 of her friends from New York, where she lives today, are in the crowd, came up to do that.

And I've got so many stories about Annie, looking out when she was playing softball, and she was in the outfield, and looking at her and she was dancing and picking flowers.

When she was very late turning in a school project, and we had stayed up a couple of nights past midnight, and we were getting toward the end, and I said, Annie, finish this page. I'm going to the bathroom; it needs to be finished when I come back. And when I came back, Annie's dancing around the dining table. And when said, why aren't you finished? And she looked and quoted Austin Powers to me: "The moon, would you miss it?"

And finally, when she was a junior in high school she wanted to take an Advanced Placement course. And the school said, you're not ready; you haven't taken the courses you need. And they wouldn't let her take it. And so she said, OK, but I'm going to take the exam. And they tried to dissuade her from doing that. Five is the highest grade you can make on one of those exams. Annie took the course, and in spite of the school saying you really shouldn't take the exam, we don't think they're ready, made a five on it.

Annie is a great sponsor for Colorado because of that determination, because of that optimism, because of that personality. And now, after last night, she's an honorary submariner and dolphin-wearer. She will imbue this ship with her conviction, her spirit. And she will serve as an inspiration and a connection between Colorado and all the people who will serve aboard her. They will remain as Sailors have been for the last 241 years: Semper Fortis, Always Courageous.

Ladies and gentlemen, the sponsor of the USS Colorado, Annie Mabus.