

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
Naming Celebration for USS South Dakota  
Sioux Falls, South Dakota  
Saturday, 23 June 2012

I'm very glad to be with you all today, Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and I particularly want to say a word of thanks to the Patriot Riders that came out and escorted me in from the airport and knew so many things about all our servicemen. So thank y'all very much.

I'm real happy to be here to officially announce that a nuclear-powered attack submarine will be named USS South Dakota. And what a more appropriate place than at the USS South Dakota Memorial to name this ship?

You know, the last South Dakota battleship was one of the most storied battleships in World War II. It participated in both the Atlantic and the Pacific theaters. But since 1927 there has not been a USS South Dakota in the fleet, and I am very glad to correct that here today.

Construction is going to start next year on SSN-790, the new South Dakota, and she is scheduled to arrive in the fleet in 2017.

South Dakota is going to be built to excel in traditional submarine warfare, things like going after other subs or going after surface targets or land attack missions. But she'll also do a lot the things that aren't conventional like delivering SEALs to their mission; she can come close to far-off shores to gather intelligence and do reconnaissance. During her service, USS South Dakota can go from the Western Pacific to the North Atlantic and under the Arctic ice doing an amazing variety of extraordinary missions.

It's going to be built in Groton, Connecticut, by Electric Boat. And these attack submarines like South Dakota are an amazing success story. They are all coming in now ahead of schedule and under budget. Earlier this month I got to go back to my home state of Mississippi. You all may have noticed that even though you have "South" in the name that our accents are a little bit different. I got to go back to my home state of Mississippi and commission the USS Mississippi, another attack submarine, which joined the fleet more than a year early and under budget.

On 9/11/2001 our fleet stood at 316 ships, and we had 377,000 Sailors. Less than eight years later, when I took this job, our fleet had dropped to 283 ships, and we had lost 49,000 Sailors. At the same time, too many of our shipbuilding programs were – and this is a technical term, I guess – they were a mess. Ships were being designed while they were being built, and costs on a lot of them were just out of control. But over the last three years, we've stabilized our shipbuilding program, and we've stabilized the fleet, and we're going to grow the fleet. Even in these tight budget times, we're going to get to 300 ships by 2019. Since December of 2010, we've put 40 ships under contract. And to give you a comparison, in 2008, there were three. I think this is a significant accomplishment not just for the Navy, but for America. We've made it

a priority to rebuild our fleet, and this ceremony is part of that. By doing this, we keep the nation safe, we keep the Navy strong, and we keep our economy going by keeping high-skill jobs in America.

USS South Dakota is going to continue a great line of our nuclear-powered Navy. The Navy has led our nation in pioneering new energy sources for years. We went from wind to coal, from coal to oil, then we pioneered the use of nuclear, and we will continue to do that as we change energy sources into the future.

This ship that we are celebrating today will be in the fleet for more than three decades. There will be Sailors who will sail on South Dakota who are not yet born. The men, and now women, who will serve onboard this sub, may well be the only Americans people in far-off lands will ever meet. And to many Americans who don't have any opportunities to see and know what the U.S. Navy does close up and just how skilled, just how talented the Sailors and Marines of our Navy and Marine Corps are. And one way to remedy that is the close connection between a ship and the state that it's named for.

This ship – this submarine is named South Dakota to honor the citizens of South Dakota, who have so strongly supported our military in so many different ways. And it honors South Dakota veterans as well, so many of whom are here today. Veterans like Sioux Falls native – and you've heard this story way more than I have – Joe Foss, a young man who dropped out of school to help run the family farm just outside of Sioux Falls, had dreams of flying and wanted to be a Marine pilot. That spirit and that work ethic kept him on that path to pay for his own college, graduate and make those dreams of flying come true. A Marine Corps captain in the Pacific in the early days of World War II, he was the first ace in World War II in the Pacific. In January 1943, over just a few days, he shot down 26 enemy aircraft over Guadalcanal. Joe Foss, for those actions, was awarded the Medal of Honor, our nation's highest honor.

And as important as a submarine like South Dakota is, as important as these technological marvels are, as complicated, as advanced as they are in what they can do, the most important thing are the Sailors who run them, the Sailors and Marines who serve this country. Fewer than 1 percent of America wears the uniform of America today. And part of why we do these celebrations is to make sure that the other 99 percent never forget who's out there standing watch, who's on the walls protecting freedom, protecting America.

So to the veterans here today, thank you for your service. Thank you for keeping us safe. Thank you for what you've done to make America stay America.

And thank all of you. Thank you for being here today. Thank you for being a part of this ship's life now, and a part of Navy history. Thank you for joining in the celebration of this great state, whose name will soon be forged in steel and be sent out to be one of the protectors of America.

In the words of the Navy motto, *semper fortis* – forever courageous. Thank you all.