

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Naming Celebration for USS Colorado
Denver, Colorado
Monday, 25 June 2012

Governor Hickenlooper, thank you so much for your hospitality here in Colorado in this beautiful statehouse. Ken Jones, thank you for that inspiring and eloquent history lesson. Thank you for your service to America, both on the USS Colorado and teaching the next generations of Americans for the rest of your career.

Whatever words I say are going to fail in comparison to what we just heard about the USS Colorado, but I am so happy to be here with you today to officially announce that our newest platform, a nuclear-powered attack submarine, will be named USS Colorado. The state's history, as the governor has told you, is wrapped up in Navy history with previous USS Colorados – the battleship that Ken served on, winning seven battle stars in World War II.

Now, I cannot imagine a better job than being secretary of the United States Navy. And one of the best things is that every secretary since the very first one, Benjamin Stoddard, 1797, has chosen the names for U.S. Navy ships. And to be able to make sure that we have another Colorado in the fleet after the previous USS Colorado was decommissioned in 1947 is something I'm very, very glad to do.

The construction of SSN 788, the new Colorado, began last year. And she is scheduled to arrive in the fleet in 2016. She'll be built to excel in the traditional areas of submarine warfare, things like going against other subs, going against surface targets, going against land targets. But she'll also be built to excel in nontraditional areas, things like delivering our SEALs to their missions or being alongside a far off shore gathering intelligence and doing surveillance.

Ken, I was a surface sailor like you on the USS Little Rock over 40 years ago, and I know what submariners call my ship: a target. In fact, we used to track submarines as one of our jobs, and we did great until they cheated and went underwater. Then, less so.

During her decades of service, Colorado may patrol the waters of the Western Pacific from the Northern Atlantic. She can go under the ice in the Arctic. She'll be doing incredibly valued and varied work.

Colorado will be built, or is being built, in Groton, Connecticut by the Electric Boat Company. These Virginia-class attack submarines have been a tremendous success story. They have been on or ahead of schedule and on or under budget. Earlier this month we commissioned the wonderfully named USS Mississippi in Pascagoula. Some of you may have recognized by my accent that I'm from a little south of here, and I do appreciate the Mississippi weather outside although you've got to get your humidity up a little bit. But the USS Mississippi set a record by delivering to the fleet over a year early. That kind of performance is a model for everything we're trying to do in the Navy today.

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, the fleet had declined to 283 ships, and we had lost almost 49,000 Sailors. At the same time, too many of our shipbuilding programs were – and I'm going to use a technical term here – a real mess. Ships were being designed while they were being built, and the costs were out of control on too many of them.

Over the last three years we've stabilized our shipbuilding program, and we have stabilized the fleet. And we will grow our fleet to 300 ships by 2019, even in this budget environment. Since December of 2010, a year and a half ago, we have placed 40 ships under contract. This compares to three ships in 2008, the year before I took office. We've done this by using management tools, things like requiring competition, things like firm fixed-price contracts. This is a significant accomplishment for the Navy and for America. This administration has made it a priority to rebuild our fleet, and today's ceremony is part of that successful effort. By doing this, we keep America safe, we keep the Navy strong around the globe, and we keep our economy strong by keeping highly skilled jobs here at home.

The USS Colorado will continue the great line of our nuclear-powered Navy. The Navy leads our nation in transitioning to new energy sources, from wind to coal, from coal to oil, pioneering nuclear as a method of transportation, and we will continue to do that.

The USS Colorado will be in our fleet for more than three decades. There will be Sailors who sail the Colorado who are not yet born today. The men and women who will serve aboard this submarine may well be the only part of America that a lot of folks around the world will ever see or have any interaction with.

And in fact, most Americans have too few opportunities to see and to know what the Navy and the Marine Corps do. One way to remedy this is by the close connection of the people of the state and the ship who bears the name of that state. You heard Ken Jones talk about the connection, the pride of the battleship Colorado. This ship, like that one, honors the citizens of Colorado, who have so strongly supported our military, and it honors Colorado's veterans, who have represented this state so well.

These platforms, these nuclear-powered submarines, are incredibly important, and the technology is incredibly good. But the most important thing, the most important thing about this, is the Sailors and Marines who man these platforms. We have the best fighting force the world has ever known. We have veterans here today who have helped man the walls, stand the watch, to make sure that America remains free and that Americans can pursue the life that we want here. To all of the veterans, thank you for what you have done. Thank you for helping keep America safe and secure throughout wars, throughout conflict and throughout our history.

Colorado has an illustrious history in the American military, veterans like Loveland native Frank Monroe Upton, who was a young naval officer aboard the USS Stewart during World War I. A ship close by had an internal explosion that sent a mass of powder boxes around the wreckage, and they were starting to explode in the water. Lieutenant Upton spotted a survivor floating among the boxes, and he immediately dove overboard to rescue him, despite

the critical danger to himself and his own safety. For that extraordinary heroism, he was awarded the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest decoration. That's the kind of veteran, that's the kind of citizen, that's the kind of character that is here in Colorado, and that's the kind of character that will sail on the new USS Colorado decades in the future. As the Colorado plies the waters of the world, it will be a living symbol of what has made this state great. It will be a name forged in steel and committed to protecting the peace.

So for all of you here today, thank you for being here and for being part of the history of the new USS Colorado. Thank you for joining in this celebration of this great state and its legacy.

In the name and words of the Navy motto, *semper paratus* – forever courageous.

Thank you all.