

First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama,
Secretary Napolitano,
Congressman Gene Taylor,
First Lady of Mississippi Marsha Barbour,
Our beloved SPARs,
Stratton Family Members,
Mr. Petters,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
The Shipbuilders of the Cutter *Stratton*,
Shipmates,
The happiest guy here Capt. Bruce Baffer,

Today we Christen a new Coast Guard cutter—*Stratton*. Christening gives a ship its identity. Its name. It's the first step in bringing a ship to life.

As the Coast Guard's Ancient Mariner, one of my duties is to keep a close watch to ensure sea-service traditions are continued – and there are few greater traditions than christening a new cutter – so I am very pleased to be with you today.

Most importantly, our service could not be more honored than to have our Nation's First Lady, Michelle Obama, serve as *Stratton's* sponsor and carry out this important time honored tradition!

Our First Lady is a champion of our military families – She's made it her mission to ensure our military families have adequate housing, medical care and support – her support is from the heart, and it's truly appreciated. I know, from my 14 years spent at sea, how important this type of support is – my wife Linda had a much harder job raising three daughters, running our house and a career as a teacher – adequate support was vital to maintaining our family. So thank you Mrs. Obama for taking care of those who remain at home when their loved ones deploy. Your continuing support of our military families, not just by word but by deed, honors their service.

Like our First Lady, Support of our Service was also the focus of Captain Dorothy Stratton, as leader of the Women's Reserve, during World War II.

Captain Stratton, in a letter to then-Commandant Russell Waesche said:

Quote: "Sir, The motto of the U.S. Coast Guard is "Semper Paratus – Always Ready." The initials of this motto, are of course, SPAR. Why not call the members of the Coast Guard Women's Reserve SPARs? As I understand it, a spar is often a **supporting beam** and that is what we hope each member of the Women's Reserve will be...I like SPARs because it really has meaning." End Quote.

Admiral Waesche readily, and wisely, accepted her suggestion.

And so, by that letter from Captain Dorothy Stratton – the SPARs were born and the SPARS became our supporting beam.

By choosing Captain Dorothy Stratton as this Cutter's namesake, a great challenge has been issued to her new crew and our Service: make this cutter a fitting tribute to her legacy.

While the day to day execution of our duties and missions is our highest priority, recapitalizing our aging fleet ranks immediately behind. Demand for our services continues to outpace our capacity to provide them – especially multi-mission Coast Guard cutters.

Christening the *Stratton* is an important step in investing in the Coast Guard's future. Our dedicated men and women need the *Stratton's* capabilities to execute their duties and the Coast Guard's challenging maritime missions. Our Coast Guardsmen deserve nothing less.

Today, in just a few minutes when our First Lady graces this ship's hull with the name *Stratton*, we will join, and forever unite, two great legacies of support to our Service –

To the crew of the *Stratton*...stand a taut watch...I look forward to the commissioning.

To our SPARS....Thank you for giving us the support to remain always ready –

To our First Lady...Thank you for your sponsorship of this cutter and crew -

And to all of you, Semper Paratus...

Another woman who has provided great support to our Coast Guard is the Secretary Napolitano. As Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, she's visited Coast Guard Cutters in the Arabian Gulf and in the shipyards. She understands the need for these ships. It is my distinct honor and privilege to introduce the Honorary Secretary Janet Napolitano...