

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH SECRETARY RAY MABUS

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THOMAS BURR: (Sounds gavel.) Welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Thomas Burr; I'm the Washington correspondent for the *Salt Lake Tribune* and the 109th President of the National Press Club. Our guest today is Ray Mabus, the 75th United States Secretary of the Navy. I would like to welcome our Public Radio and C-SPAN audiences, and I want to remind you that you can follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag NPCLive. That's NPCLive.

Now it's time to introduce our head table guests. I'd ask each of you to stand briefly as your name is announced. Please hold your applause until I've finished introducing the entire table. From your right, Max Lederer, publisher of *Stars and Stripes*; Pat Host, Assistant Managing Editor at *Defense Daily*; Vago Muradian, Editor at *Defense and Aerospace Reports*; Chris Cavas, naval warfare reporter at *Defense News*; Michael Phelps, former naval officer and publisher of *The Washington Examiner*; Ted Opiel, chief of staff to the Secretary of the Navy; Katherine Skiba, former Chair of the Press Club Speaker Committee and the Washington correspondent for *The Chicago Tribune*.

Skipping over our speaker for just a moment, the Honorable John Warner, former Secretary of the Navy and United States Senator from the Commonwealth of Virginia; Kevin Wensing, a retired U. S. Navy captain and the Press Club Speakers Committee member who organized today's event. Thank you, Kevin. Michael Schmidt, correspondent for *The New York Times*; Eric Meltzer, senior news production specialist at

the Associated Press; and Shawn Bullard, president of Duetto Group, LLC. Thank you all. (Applause)

Also, a quick thank you to two other special guests today in the audience. Former Secretary of the Navy, John Dalton; and former Acting Secretary of the Navy, B. J. Penn. Thank you, gentlemen. (Applause)

Our guest today is Ray Mabus, the 75th United States Secretary of the Navy, and the longest to serve as leader of the Navy and Marine Corps since World War I. With an annual budget in excess of \$170 billion, and almost 900,000 people under his leadership, Secretary Mabus has focused on improving the quality of life of sailors and decreasing the dependence on fossil fuels. He has strengthened partnerships with industry, assured international counterparts of sustained engagement, worked to deter the adversaries and increase the size of the Navy fleets.

Leading the world's only global Navy, Mabus has visited over 150 countries and territories, and all 50 states meeting with sailors and marines deployed or stationed around the world, and maintaining and developing international relationships. Under his tenure, the Navy has changed its personnel policy, making promotions more merit based. Today, all billets in both the Navy and Marines are now open to women.

Mabus also reversed the decline in ship count and directed the Navy and Marine Corps to change the way they use energy, setting a goal of relying on alternative sources for at least 50 percent of their energy by 2020. In June 2010, President Obama added to his duties by charging him with preparation of the long-term recovery plan for the Gulf of Mexico following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

A native of Ackerman, Mississippi, Mabus served as that state's governor from 1988 to 1992. In 1994, President Bill Clinton named him the U. S. ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Today on the eve of the U. S. Navy's 241st birthday, he'll provide us with a state of the Navy and Marine Corps. Please give a warm National Press Club welcome to Secretary Mabus. (Applause)

SECRETARY MABUS: Tom, thank you so much, and thank you to the National Press Club. Thank you all for being here today. I want to single out a few people that you've already introduced, but three of my predecessors, John Warner, John Dalton, B. J. Penn as Acting Secretary when I came in. These are three of the finest public servants you will ever meet. (Applause) And I'm talking about John Warner the person now, and not *John Warner*, the ship. (Laughter)

I don't know if anyone in this club has noticed, but there's an election going on. And with that election's going to bring a new administration. And I think that now is a very appropriate time to take the measure of what we've done in this administration, what we've accomplished in the Navy and the Marine Corps, institutions that are founded on tradition and legacy and continuity, but also on change and adaptability.

To quote one of our former chiefs of naval operations, our Navy has both the tradition and a future and we look with pride and confidence in both directions. So that's what I'm going to do today. As Tom said, give you the state of the Navy. To demonstrate how the actions that we've taken over the last 7 ½ years will insure that the future of our Navy and Marine Corps will be as bright as its storied past.

In his poem, "The Laws of the Navy," British Admiral Roland Hopgood wrote, "On the strength of one link in the cable dependeth the might of the chain. Who knows when thy mayest be tested, so live that thou bearest the strain." And we've been tested. Among the challenges when I came into office, we had a shrinking fleet and a very bad economy. We've had our hands tied to sequestration, and it continues to hang around to make our planning very difficult.

Oil dependency and volatility threatened operations and training and was costing lives. And bad laws and an antiquated personnel system limited our ability to attract and retain America's most talented young people. All of this, all of this happened during rising threats, a far more complicated world, and an ever increasing demand for naval forces. And yet, I am confident that when history looks back on this tenure, it will find that we not only bore the strain, but that we fixed the cable. We set the course for many additional strong links of the chain in the years and decades ahead.

Now, at every place, you've got one of these. Little trifold with a small selection of the achievements we've made across a wide range of priorities. And there's going to be a test later, so I urge you to look at it. (Laughter) They're all important. I think they're all meaningful, but today I'm going to concentrate on three of these; shipbuilding, energy, people.

There's a saying that 80 percent of success is just showing up, and now that I've shown up longer than any Secretary since World War I, as Tom mentioned, I guess I could claim some success just based on that. But that shouldn't be the standard. It's not the standard. For me, and particularly not for our Navy and Marine Corps, the standard is, and has to be, way higher. And we've never just shown up. From when John Paul Jones defeated the British in their own back yard in 1779, to when Marines planted the flag on top of Mount Suribachi in 1945 to when President Kennedy had a naval quarantine of Cuba and averted nuclear war in 1962, to when President Obama relied on carrier-based naval aviation as his only strike option against ISIS for 54 days in 2015, the U. S. Navy and the U. S. Marines uniquely and without lapse have provided presence around the globe, and around the clock.

And to take this one step farther, we don't just show up, we're already there. That unrivaled advantage on, above, beneath, and from the sea, insures stability, reassures allies, deters adversaries and gives our nation leaders a lot of options in times of crisis. I call the Navy and Marine Corps America's away team, because sailors and marines, equally in times of peace are not just in the right place at the right time, they're in the right place all the time. We're the away team because we never get a home game. We don't want a home game. But we are there, and there's no next best thing to being there.

In every case, from behind combat to irregular warfare to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, naval assets get there faster, we stay on station longer, we bring everything we need with us. And because we're operating from sovereign U. S. territory, we don't have to ask any other country's permission to get the job done.

Now, to get that presence, we have to have gray hulls on the horizon. Quantity has a quality all its own. To say that the Navy is too focused on building ships, it's really to admit sort of an ignorance of its purpose. We're the Navy! We need ships. We need enough ships to do every job that we're given. So I've made shipbuilding one of my top priorities, and we dramatically reverse the decline in the size of the fleet.

In 2001, the U. S. Navy had 316 ships. Seven years later, 2008, we were down to 278 ships. During that seven years, the Navy put 41 ships under contract; not enough to keep our fleet from continuing to shrink, and not enough to keep our shipyards going. I've been there a little over seven years now, so it's an absolute comparison. In the seven years that I've been there, we've put 86 ships under contract. We've done so at the same time that we've increased aircraft purchases by 35 percent, and we've done it all with a smaller top line.

Our efforts, and I want to stress here that those efforts have been supported by Congress, guarantee that just with the ships under contract, just with the ships we've got out there under contract or under construction today, we'll get to 300 ships by 2019, and we'll get to our current assessed need of 308 ships by 2021. Takes a long time to build a fleet. Takes a long time to reverse the consequences of a shrinking fleet.

But by implementing just basic business practices, firm, fixed price contracts, multi-year buys, stable requirements, we've increased the numbers while driving down the cost on virtually every type of ship. Give you a couple of examples. On our littoral combat ships, the cost has decreased by nearly half in contrast to those hulls contracted prior to 2009. And while the costs have gone down, the capabilities have gone up. We're upgrading the design to significantly increase LCS's lethality and survivability. And because of their enhanced counter submarine capabilities, and contributing to our strike group operations, we're designating those future ships as frigates.

The DDG 51, Arleigh Burke class destroyers, is another example of a very successful shipbuilding program. Sixty-two of these ships are currently operating in the fleet. Today, we're in the fourth year of a multiyear procurement. And thanks to competition, and also thanks to the hard work and the talent at our shipyards, the DDG 51 multiyear contract is saving more than \$2 billion over its predecessors.

Same thing with submarines. In April 2014, we awarded the biggest contract Navy's ever awarded; \$18 billion for 10 Virginia class attack submarines. Now, these submarines cost \$2 billion apiece. And this is doing math in public, but we paid for nine, we got ten. It's like having one of those punch cards. Buy nine subs, get your tenth one free and we've done it.

Finally, every one of you need one of these, one of these punch cards. We've expanded unmanned systems in all domains. And we've increased the focus on this by establishing a Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for unmanned and an office on the Navy staff in '99 designed specifically to coordinate all unmanned programs. And as these manned and unmanned platforms join the fleet, we're equipping them all with the most advanced technologies; things like laser weapons and coming things like rail guns. We've protected research and development and science and technology dollars so that we will continue to have the technological edge. I don't ever, ever want to send Marines and sailors into a fair fight.

Our efforts to rebuild the fleet have benefited more than just the Navy and Marine Corps. From Marinette, Wisconsin to Mobile, Alabama, from Bath, Maine, to San Diego, California, American workers build, maintain and repair our platforms. Tens of thousands of skilled employees are employed by our public shipyards. Four hundred thousand U. S. jobs are tied directly or indirectly to the maritime industry, and 41 million jobs, 41 million jobs, are tied to international seaborne trade.

For every job created in shipbuilding, almost three other jobs are created in other parts of the economy. And since 2009, we have created 8,000 new jobs in our shipyards. These are American manufacturing jobs with an average salary of more than \$75,000. The overall impact of shipbuilding and maritime trade is so great that the industry, the shipbuilding industry, produced more than \$25 billion in labor income, and more than \$37 billion in GDP in 2015.

When these platforms get to the fleet, they protect the sea lanes and through these sea lanes, 90 percent of the world's trade go every year, \$9 trillion every year. These are facts. These are, as Casey Stengel used to say, you can go look it up. But the fact is that the focus on shipbuilding has produced undeniably substantial, tangible benefits for our Navy and Marine Corps, for American industry, and American workers, and for America. It's advanced both our own economy and the global economy and contributed to international security in a way that benefits every American.

But increasing fleet size is only part of the equation. We have to have them the right place. We have to have them all the time to provide presence. And the way that we do that with ships, with aircraft, with sailors, Marines, is by the energy we use. When I came in in 2009, oil had reached \$140 a barrel and we were having to make choices between operational-- between operations overseas and training here at home. And worst of all, we were losing a marine, killed or wounded, for every 50 convoys of fuel we brought into Afghanistan, which is way high, too high a price to pay.

Now, the price of oil has eased up. But over time, if you look at it, it's going in one direction only and that's up. And as recently as the last few days, OPEC has announced new negotiations on supply restrictions to get prices back up. And while the final outcome of those negotiations in the short term remains unknown, for the first time Russia has shown a willingness to cooperate. And speaking of Russia, you only have to

look at what happened in Crimea or what Russia did to Ukraine to see how energy can be used as a weapon.

And that's why I took action to reestablish the Department of the Navy as a world leader in energy and energy innovation. And the reason was to make us better war fighters. Our Navy and Marine Corps have always been on the cutting edge of energy innovation. We led in the transition from sail to coal, from coal to oil, for the use of nuclear for transportation. In that tradition, it was clear that we had to lead in the transition to alternatives in order to maintain the edge that we have to have.

And as I said, first and foremost, we've done this to be better war fighters. But we can't ignore the effects of climate change. As new routes open to the arctic, in the arctic, as sea levels rise, as storms increase in intensity, the Navy and Marine Corps are the first responders and our responsibilities increase.

We also have to lead in the response to climate change. So in 2009, I set a number of very specific, pretty ambitious energy goals, the most significant of which is that by no later than 2020, at least half of all naval energy afloat and ashore would come from non-fossil fuel sources. President Obama reiterated the shore part of that goal in his 2012 State of the Union saying that Navy would get 50 percent, or one gigawatt, of our energy from non-fossil fuel sources by 2020.

So, how we doing? We got to 50 percent on shore last year, five years early. And today, on our shore installations, we get more than 1.2 gigawatt of energy out of our total 2 gigawatt requirement from alternative sources. We're also on pace to meet our goals at sea and in the air. In just seven years, the great green fleet was envisioned and tested and deployed. A strike group where all the ships were sailing on either nuclear or blended biofuels. Our biofuels are drop-in fuels. We're not changing our engines, we're not changing anything. They don't take any land out of food production and they're cost competitive with traditional fuels.

And other countries are following suits, and other industries are following suit. At Rim of the Pacific this past August, nine different countries took blended biofuels for refueling from one of our ships. And in June, I was in the Mediterranean on a U. S. destroyer next to an Italian oiler taking Italian biofuel onto the U. S. destroyer, while on the other die of the oiler was an Italian frigate taking blended biofuels at the same time.

The geo strategic example that I use is in Singapore, there's an oil refinery owned, majority, by the Chinese. Right down the road is a biofuel refinery owned by the Finns. I do not want to be dependent on China for my fuel oil in the western Pacific. I want to have that option, I want to have the choice of doing something else.

And the civilian side is following along. Jet Blue just announced a ten year contract for biofuels, United Airlines, Alaska Air, Virgin Air, UPS, FedEx, all flying at least part of the time on biofuels.

Now, there were those who criticized the price we paid for a small amount of test biofuels that we bought in 2012 for our first demonstration. These same folks are really strangely silent after we bought operational quantities this year as part of our regular fuel purchase for less than \$2.14 a gallon, a price that is absolutely competitive with conventional fuel.

And the Marines, and when you first think of Marines, you don't think of ardent environmentalists, probably, the Marines have led the way in alternative energy like using knee braces to-- as Marines walk or march, which they had a tendency to do, the movement of their legs transfers into energy to power things like their radios, their GPSs. And in parallel to the types of energy, parallel to alternatives, we've gone after efficiencies, changing the whole culture of energy consumption in the Navy and Marine Corps.

At the recommendation of a Navy chief, we're retrofitting all our ships with LED lights as they come through the shipyard. Just doing that, changing the light bulbs, saves 20,000 gallons of fuel per year per destroyer. We've also invested in technologies like hybrid electric drives that enable ships like a big deck amphib, the *U. S.S. Makin Island*, to not only increase its time on station during its first deployment by more than a third, it was at sea 44 days longer than any other ship with it, but to bring home almost half of her fuel budget when she came back.

And those combined efforts in alternatives, in efficiencies have produced what I think a lot of people would have thought were just unimaginable results when we started. Ashore, by switching, we've saved \$90 million. We've gotten \$60 million in energy upgrades, and 22 million tons of carbon dioxide have been evaded. And along with our work at sea, our initiatives, as a whole, have contributed to a reduction in oil use of 15 percent by the Navy and 60 percent by the Marines. Not to be fair, part of that drop for the Marines were largely out of two land wars, but that is clearly not the only reason that oil consumption is that far down.

But as impressive as these statistics are, and I think they're pretty impressive, they're not what matters. What matters is how these statistics influence our ability to provide that presence I talked about. These efforts are making our SEAL teams far more stealthy to the point that they're getting close to net zero in terms of both energy and water. They're using alternative energy in the field to purify water so they can stay out far longer. It's making our Marines more agile, since just by giving them rollup solar panels they can put in their pack, they're saving 700 pounds of batteries per company that they don't have to hump and they don't have to be re-supplied.

And our bases are more resilient if we ever have an attack on our grids. These are the real impacts of our efforts to give the United States a strategic advantage and operational flexibility.

And finally, having the right number and the right type of ships, and the means to get them where they're needed still fall short if you don't have the sailors and Marines

who can offer the diverse perspectives required by solve today's very complex problems, perspective and diverse being the important words. From one perspective, it's critically important-- we were talking about before-- during lunch today, about one of the great privileges and also the great responsibilities of being Secretary of the Navy is to name all naval ships. And it's critically important to honor the people and the traditions that have sustained the Navy and the Marine Corps for 241 years.

And that's why I've named ships after nine Medal of Honor recipients, two Navy Cross recipients, individuals who have fought and in many cases died, sacrificing for American values. From another perspective, it's equally important to honor those American values themselves. Our founding fathers set out to form a more perfect union, acknowledging the American experiment that challenges us to live up to the principles every day established in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

That's why, in accordance with the longstanding naval tradition of establishing new naming conventions for new class of ships, and for naming naval support ships for non-military people, I've also named eight ships in honor of civil rights and human rights heroes, people like Medger Evers, Cesar Chavez, John Lewis, Harvey Milk, Earl Warren, Lucy Stone, Sojourner Truth. Americans who fought and who also died often pursuing our most sacred values; justice, freedom, equality.

One of those ships that I named last month was the *U.S.N.S. Robert F. Kennedy* at the Kennedy Library in Boston. And when I named that ship, I was reminded of a George Bernard Shaw quote that Robert Kennedy used a lot. "There are those who look at things the way they are and ask why. I dream of things that never were and ask why not." When I became Secretary of the Navy in 2009, there were a lot of things I encountered that begged the question, why not? At that time, openly gay Americans were not allowed to serve in the military. Why not? In the Navy, women weren't permitted to serve aboard submarines or in riverines or in the SEALs. Why not?

In the Marines, women were into accepted into ground combat roles. Why not? On the campuses of Harvard, Columbia, Yale, Princeton, our ROTC had been gone for decades. Why? Why not bring it back? In every case, as is always the case, or nearly always the case with these kind of questions, there wasn't a good answer. So I strongly supported the repeal of don't ask, don't tell and led the implementation in the Navy and the Marine Corps.

I also in 2010 opened service on submarines and riverine squadrons to women, a call for an increase in female midshipmen at the Naval Academy, and I advocated for opening all combat specialties to women across the Navy and Marine Corps, which happened this past January. In working with the presidents of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, we brought naval ROTC back to those campuses. And at the same time, we established naval ROTC units at Rutgers and Arizona State, two of the most diverse campuses in our country.

And we're doing this not diversity for diversity sake, but a diverse force is a stronger force. It's a dangerous thing for the military to think too much in the same way. It's a dangerous thing for a military force to become too predictable. A more predictable force is a more defeatable force. And every time we've opened our services up, every time, from the time they were desegregated in the late '40s up through opening ground combat this year, every time we become stronger.

It's also dangerous when there's too big a gap in a democracy between those doing the protecting and those being protected. Our pursuit of diversity in thinking, diversity in experience, diversity in background, gives us strength and guarantees that our Navy and Marine Corps are both reflective of and representative of the nation they defend. But, as we've opened up opportunities for everyone to serve, in no case are we lowering standards. Lowering standards is unacceptable, unacceptable under the law, unacceptable to me, unacceptable to every leader in the military because not only would it endanger sailors and Marines, but it would endanger the security of our nation.

But while there's no good argument to lower standards, there is also no good argument to bar anyone who has met those standards from serving alongside sailors and Marines in every clime and place. If a person qualifies in every way for service, how can we possibly say that they cannot share in the honor of defending this country because of the shape of their skin, the color of their skin, or because of who they love? We can't, we shouldn't, and now we don't.

The story that brought this home to me, or the experience, I've been to Afghanistan 12 times. On one of those trips, I went through Manas, Kyrgyzstan, where we had a big base. And everybody coming into or out of Afghanistan usually transited through there. And I spoke to about 800 sailors and Marines, about half coming in, about half coming home. And after the all hands call, a first class petty officer came up, sort of hung around afterwards, and he said, "I just want to thank you and everyone who was involved, for repealing don't ask, don't tell." Said, "I've been in the Navy for 12 years." He had just finished his third combat tour, third combat tour in Afghanistan and Iraq. Three combat tours, and yet his biggest fear, his biggest fear, was that he was going to be found out as gay and made to leave the service that he loved. How wrong is that? How wrong is that?

Now, recruiting more diverse force has to be followed by retaining, developing, and advancing that force. So we've implemented the most sweeping reforms and personnel policies since my CNO, Elmo Zumwalt, in the late '60s, early '70s. Seven years ago, we were losing too many people, especially women, because we weren't doing all that we could to uphold a healthy working environment. Sailors and Marines too often had to choose between service and family. Too rigid career paths stifled professional development. Time and service was the primary determinant of advancement and our operations tempo was very high, and also very unpredictable.

So we've taken deliberate steps under an initiative called 21st Century Sailor Marine to foster professional, supportive, inclusive workplace and we're absolutely

committed from the deck plates to senior leadership, to combating the crime of sexual assault, which is why I've created the only secretariat level sexual assault prevention and response officer who reports directly to me. We've increased protections for sailors and Marines suffering from traumatic brain injury or PTSD. Too many times, they were administratively discharged for some bad act and the bad act took precedence over whether they had PTSD or TBI. And they were given bad paper when they left so they couldn't get any help once they got out.

We've reversed that. Before you can be discharged administratively, we're going to test you, see if you've got TBI, PTSD. Now, you still may be administratively discharged, but when you leave, you'll leave with good paper that allows you to get help through the VA, through the systems that we've got out there in place.

And taking a bigger view on health, we've revamped physical fitness tests, making them more realistically aligned with the jobs we do. And we're trying to promote healthier lifestyles by cultural fitness and by better nutrition. And part of taking care of sailors and Marines is making it easier for them to take care of themselves and their families. So we've made career paths a lot more flexible.

One example which we've just dramatically expanded is the career and admission program. You can take up to three years off. You owe us two for one back, but you can take up to three years off for anything. Have a family, look after a loved one, get a degree that you want that we may not be willing to pay for. When they return, they're not penalized, but rather they compete with those who are similarly situated. We've extended childcare hours by two hours on each end, and I triple paid maternity leave from six weeks to 18 weeks.

And one of the things we're trying to do is as Thucydides, the Athenian general said, a nation that draws too broad a distinction between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools. So we're expanding educational opportunities, we're expanding training opportunities, we're expanding opportunities to go into industry. And to tap into that innovative culture, we've also established taskforce innovation. We're getting ideas from the deck plates. They're coming up, they're being voted on through a crowd sourcing platform. They get up to the CNO, to me, to the senior leadership and we're funding them.

And in things like COs are now able to meritoriously promote up to five percent of their sailors that serve under them. And if they don't use the whole five percent, it goes back into a pool. So, my time in this job is coming to an end. After I leave here today, I start a series of visits to our fleet concentration and our shipyards, Groton and Hampton Roads, San Diego, Mayport, Washington State, Great Lakes, Luzerne [?], Mayport. It's to see the people who've done the work, made the changes, built the ships and in Navy talk, give them a Bravo Zulu, well done.

I do this and I will depart in a few months knowing that this administration has taken the necessary steps to assure that our Navy has never been stronger; for getting the

right number of platforms to meet our mission. We're using energy in a deliberate way that has made us better war fighters. We represent the greatest people that America has to offer, the absolute best in the world. I'm going to finish with a quote from an Asian chief of Navy who said that the difference in soldiers and sailors is that soldiers look down. They see lines on a map, they see obstacles. That sailors look out, they look to the horizon. They don't see any lines, they don't see any obstacles. They see that horizon and want to know what's over it.

So looking to that horizon, looking ahead, I'm confident that the policies we've enacted, the decisions we've made and the priorities that we've set guarantee that our Navy and our Marine Corps will remain the greatest expeditionary fighting force the world has ever known for as far into the future as the eye can see. From the Navy, *semper fortis*, always courageous. From the Marines, *semper fi*, always faithful. Thank you all. (Applause)

MR. BURR: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. We've got a few questions for you here, and by a few I mean quite a few, and we've got about 15 minutes left, so we're going to try to run through as many as we can. First off, some developing news, a U. S. ship was fired on outside of Yemen on Sunday. Can you shed any light on what defensive measures were taken and what's being done now about that?

SECRETARY MABUS: The *Mason*, as you pointed out, was fired upon. The ship took-- I'll put it this way-- the appropriate defensive measures. Still looking into exactly whose responsible, although it came from Houthi controlled region. And I'll just quote what the Pentagon spokesman said. "People who attack, or attempt to attack a U. S. Navy ship do so at their peril."

MR. BURR: A question from the--

SECRETARY MABUS: Who asked that question? I mean, I have a tradition of first question gets a coin, so if you want--

MR. BURR: I believe that question came from CNN so we can get back to CNN when that comes in.

SECRETARY MABUS: Here we go. (Laughter)

MR. BURR: A question in the audience as well. Who poses the biggest threat to the United States as a nation, and how would you rate it? ISIL, China, Russia, North Korea or Iran? And do we have a big enough Navy to confront all these challenges at the same time?

SECRETARY MABUS: Well, I'm not going to get in the business of rating. All these are potential threats. All these pose very serious and very current challenges. And we have to pay attention to all of them. I don't think we can pick one and say we're going to take care of you and ignore the rest. In answer to the second part of your question, we

have not had a big enough fleet. We have had to make choices. We will have a big enough fleet in 2021 to meet our current assessed needs and do all the missions that the United States gives us, and even though we're rebalancing the Pacific, and we'll put 60 percent of the fleet there, it's a much bigger fleet so we're not ignoring NATO, putting four ships in Rota, Spain, we've already got them there.

We're not ignoring CENTCOM, Middle East, we're not ignoring any of these potential threats.

MR. BURR: As you spoke about, you recently changed the Navy ratings to make them gender neutral with the exception of the basic enlisted rank of seaman. With all the other challenges the country is facing right now, the audience member wants to know why did you make this a priority?

SECRETARY MABUS: Well, couple of things. One is it changes for the Marines, too. And it's to quit segregating women. We do it by uniforms, women wear different uniforms. Can you imagine if we ask another group to wear a different kind of uniform and it was a historical accident? Ratings names change all the time, all the time. When I was in 45 years ago, the people that were in my division were radiomen and signalmen. We don't have any of those anymore. Those ratings have changed. Corpsmen, our medics, that rating came in after World War II.

The first were called, corpsmen were first called, loblolly boys, which I'm not sure where that came from, but we change these things all the time. And I thought it was important to be gender neutral. Now, we've gone one step farther in the Navy. My first direction was to make them gender neutral. At the recommendation that came back to me from the master chief petty officer of the Navy, we're changing the way we-- we're changing our ratings structure so that instead of being a yeoman third class, you're going to be a petty officer third class, the way you're addressed.

We're doing this for basically three reasons. And I'll give you one example. We've got several different specialties for working on aircraft. We've got structural, mechanics, we've got people who work on avionics, we've got people who work on the engines, and they can only promote through their narrow communities. And we're losing people because they can't promote. So what we're going to try to do is put a lot of these specialties that are close to each other together so that while you're a specialist in one thing, you can also train and become a specialist in three or four other areas so that you can promote in one if you can't promote in the other so that your next duty assignment won't be just one place that you can go. You know, you'll have a choice, and we'll have a choice as to where to send you.

And we're going to train all our aircraft folks to FAA standards. We're going to train our corpsmen and our medics to EMT standards so that right now when you leave the Navy, or leave the Marine Corps, a lot of times, even though you've got the skill level, you don't have the certification. You can't get a job working at United Airlines right

across the street. You got to go back and start over. You can't get a job with an EMT crew. So, those are the reasons we chose that.

MR. BURR: On the same point, the Army has graduated three female rangers now. When might we see a woman become a Navy SEAL?

SECRETARY MABUS: I don't know, and I don't think that's the important thing. I think the important thing is that it's open and the standards are the same. And just as a side note, the SEALs have been pretty neutral about this because they've had the same standards for years, and 80 percent of men don't make it. So it's not an easy thing to do. But, I don't know when a woman will go through, I don't know when one will make it, but the important thing is that if they've got the qualifications, if they can make it through that training, they get to serve.

MR. BURR: Question, we're switching subjects a little bit here, do you think a cyber Pearl Harbor is imminent? Do you think the United States is too dependent on information technology and that could be an Achilles heel for the United States?

SECRETARY MABUS: I think that we had become too dependent on networks, on cyber. I think we're taking a lot of steps now to correct that. Everything from layering defenses, taking better care to protect our most critical assets, to having a lot of redundant systems, to even going back, we're teaching flags and lights at the academy and in our ROTC again. We're teaching line of sight communication so that they can't be intercepted and they can't be taken down.

We understand the vulnerability as posed, but I think that over a wide span of issues, we're dealing with it.

MR. BURR: Another subject. The Chinese are building islands in the South China Sea and threatening its neighbors. Can you assure the people of Taiwan and our friends in the region that the United States and American Navy will be ready and capable of defending the interests there?

SECRETARY MABUS: What I can assure everybody of is that we're going to be there, as we've been there for 70 years. We're going to be there with enough ships and enough presence, enough people, enough aircraft and systems to do whatever the job is we need to do. We're going to continue to do as we have for 70 years keep those sea lanes open. We're going to continue to insist on freedom of navigation. We're going to insist on freedom of navigation both on the sea and in the air. That's our job.

And as a side note, some of the great beneficiaries of the U. S. Navy doing this, and U. S. Marines doing this, have been the countries of Asia including countries like China.

MR. BURR: On a related topic, if President Duterte ends the Philippines military to military relationship, how would that affect your posture in Southeast Asia?

SECRETARY MABUS: Well, I don't answer speculative questions, so I'll just say that regardless of what happens in any one country, we have friends, we have partners, we have allies all over that part of the world and over the world that we work closely with and that we have, going back to the first question, enough platforms, the right kind of platforms in the right place to do whatever job, whatever task, the United States gives us, and the world gives us.

MR. BURR: LGBT rights have expanded greatly since President Bill Clinton's don't ask, don't tell policy. And you mentioned in your speech a little bit, anecdotes of stories you've heard. But have there been any problems with morale since the policy was ended?

SECRETARY MABUS: It's been the biggest nothing I've ever seen. I mean, just nothing. I go and do all hands calls and one of the ways-- I've done hundreds of them, maybe thousands by this point. One of the ways I know what's on sailors and Marines minds is we don't have many shy sailors and Marines. If you open it up, they'll ask you questions. They'll give you a comment. And leading up to the repeal of don't ask, don't tell, I got practically no questions on it. I have gotten zero since then, and you look out around the fleet, and it's just nothing.

And it's the same thing that happened when we ended segregation. There were terrible predictions of what was going to happen. Same thing when we started recruiting large numbers of women in the '80s, terrible predictions of what was going to happen. And it just never has come to pass, and it certainly didn't in this case.

MR. BURR: Thank you. Haiti's recovering from a devastating hurricane. How can the U. S. Navy help the people of Haiti?

SECRETARY MABUS: We're already there. We sorted ships prior to the hurricane. We've had the *Mesa Verde* down there, a marine amphibious ship. It's being relieved today by the *Iwo Jima*. We've already delivered-- the last number I saw was as of the close of yesterday, 114 tons of supplies. We don't have to wait for airports to get fixed. We don't have to wait for harbors to get fixed, we can-- we're amphibious, we can find a beach and go ashore.

We've got the *Comfort*, our hospital ship, ready to respond if asked. And we've answered every one of the responses for help so far that we've gotten.

MR. BURR: Great. Question on global warming and climate change. Will climate change in some way, are you worried, will force closure of any Navy and Marine Corps bases? And are you planning for this? For example, where would Norfolk move if you had to?

SECRETARY MABUS: Well, okay I'm going to Norfolk this week and it's not going anywhere, Norfolk. (Laughter) Well, some of the forecasts are that in this century,

Norfolk will become at risk, and maybe within the next four to five decades. Now, I've been Secretary of the Navy a long time, I don't think I'm going to be there in 2050. But, Norfolk is one that's at risk due to rising sea levels. It's not the only one. You may notice we have our bases mainly on the ocean. And as sea levels rise, we begin to experience problems. It's one of the reasons we're trying to attack climate change, one of the reasons that we're trying to lead the way and trying to reverse some of these effects so we won't have to face the fact of a base being in danger.

MR. BURR: Thank you, sir. Before I ask the last question, a quick reminder, the National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists, and we fight for a free press worldwide. For more information about the club, please visit our website at Press.org. It's Press.org. I'd also like to remind you about some upcoming programs. On October 17, NBA legend, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar will speak at the Press Club. And October 19, Secretary of Education, John B. King will join us. Now, I'd like to present our guest the traditional National Press Club mug.

SECRETARY MABUS: Which comes in under the \$10 I can receive.

MR. BURR: Yes. It's Navy blue and I think you now have a set of these, by the way. So last question for you, sir. The Navy Midshipmen have enjoyed a long winning streak, I believe it's 14-0 over the football rivals, the Army Black Knights. (Applause) So, I'm going to guess I know the answer to this, but what is your prediction for the Army-Navy game this year?

SECRETARY MABUS: Well, I'm going to say three things about this. Number one, did you all see the game last week against Houston? Ranked number six in the country, by the way. And my alma mater, the Ol' Miss Rebels thank you for moving them up in the polls.

Number two, we're going to be humble about this, against Army we're going to just take it one decade at a time. (Laughter)

And number three, go Navy, beat Army. (Applause)

MR. BURR: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. We are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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