Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus

Secretary of the Navy

MINNESOTA Commissioning, Newport News, Virginia

7 September, 2013

To our wonderful CNO, Admiral Greenert, thank you so much. Admiral Greenert is a great partner to have. He is a proud submariner and I have to say that I have just the slightest bit of hesitation around submariners, being a former surface sailor. I know what they call our ships, targets. To my neighbor Senator Warner, Senator Klobuchar, Senator Franken, to Congresswoman McCollum, Congressman Scott, Congressman Whittman, to the Captain and Crew of the USS MINNESOTA, to our distinguished visitors on an off the platform, and all of you who have come to Hampton Roads on this late, beautiful summer day, thank you for joining us as we commission the newest member of our fleet, the USS MINNESOTA. I too

want to add a special thanks to our sponsor Ellen Roughead. I understand that you are married to someone who was in the Navy, and have a good grasp of the Navy, and that he is in the audience today along with your daughter. The service that Ellen Roughead brought to our country by supporting our Sailors and their families, over the years, has been a testament to her and to her native state of Minnesota.

This is an exciting day for a couple of reasons, looking back at what has been accomplished in building this powerful warship and looking forward to what the future holds for it and the crew who sail in her. For the Sailors and Officers who make up the boat’s crew, one day soon you’ll be getting underway, taking her out the Thimble Shoals channel and going to your dive point.

The Boat you will be taking out, as you have heard, is a modern marvel. It was just 28 months ago that Ellen Roughead was here to preside over the keel-laying with the crew of MINNESOTA. In that time over a thousand shipyard craftsmen and engineers have worked directly on what is by far the most advanced submarine in the world. Today marks the culmination of their hard work, their skill, their dedication as we commission this boat, again, as you have heard, almost a year ahead of schedule and on budget. Now as a former governor of Mississippi I do have to take a moment to mention that while she is 11 months ahead of schedule, MISSISSIPPI was delivered a year ahead of schedule, and still holds the records. As

one of my predecessors, Secretary of the Navy William Jones who was Secretary during the War of 1812, wrote “those who are employed in the shipyard are a valuable and independent class.”

In 200 years since the War of 1812, little has changed. It is one of the strengths of our system, the amazing work of our Navy civilians and industry partners. It is because of their relentless drive to improve construction standards and raise efficiency that we are able to build the platforms we have for a global navy. It is what makes our presence around the world possible, not just in the right place at the right time, but in the right place all the time.

MINNESOTA and the success of our VIRGINIA Class submarines prove that acquisition excellence isn’t just a talking point; it is how we are building the future fleet. In the past four years we have arrested the decline in the size our fleet.

Since May 2009 we have put 60 ships under contract and are on a pace to return the fleet to 300 ships before the end of this decade. That building plan includes 2 VIRGINIA class submarines a year. The men and women who build them here at Huntington Ingalls and at Electric Boat have helped to make the Fleet stronger and our nation safer. To maintain our presence and our influence around the world, our platforms matter. Our platforms have always mattered. You are surrounded by them here today in Norfolk.

This crew and I have already spent a little time together. This past spring we shared the honor of participating in the internment of a group of United States Sailors at Arlington National Cemetery. The men were Civil War veterans who perished aboard USS MONITOR when our nation’s first Ironclad went down in a storm off North Carolina in 1862. For the United States Sailor, in times of war or in times of peace this is a perilous profession. On, above, and below

the sea, they face dangers greater than just combat.

Members of this MINNESOTA crew came to Arlington to honor the memory of the Sailors who have gone before them, and to honor Sailors who had served in battle with a previous MINNESOTA crew. Just a little ways from here, in the direction of Fort Monroe, in 1862 the first USS MINNESOTA fought a bloody battle with the Confederate ship VIRGINIA. Off of Newport News they battled for hours with the Confederate ship whose revolutionary technology as an Ironclad made it absolutely impervious to their cannon.

MINNESOTA survived that day. The next morning USS MONITOR, and those Sailors we buried at Arlington, appeared and placed themselves between the damaged MINNESOTA and a fresh assault from VIRGINIA. The Union ships drove off the VIRGINIA, and after the battle the MINNESOTA was repaired and sent south to North Carolina for the Battle of Fort Fisher, where nine of her crewmembers earned the Medal of Honor.

Today it is the crew of this MINNESOTA that has the most advanced ship sailing the world’s oceans. This submarine is one of the most powerful vessels the world has ever seen. It will serve our nation for the next four decades, sailing the seven seas, from the frigid North Atlantic and polar ice cap to the tropical waters of the South Pacific, on patrol and providing presence.

The history of this ship’s name reinforces for me two fundamental truths that I have learned as Secretary. First, that American technology and innovation have always led the world, from our first six frigates, through the days of the Ironclads, to today’s nuclear powered attack submarines like USS MINNESOTA. It isn’t about how much they cost, because if we did it by cost alone we’d still be using sails. It is the combat advantage that they give us on and under the sea. Second, and most important, that the heart of our Navy and our most important priority, and the thing that gives us the edge no matter what the circumstances continues to be the skilled, the dedicated, the always courageous United States Sailor.

You see those Sailors standing before you in their dress uniforms, you see them around you as veterans of wars that we have fought in far flung places, you see them today, but mostly you do

not see them. We are America’s Away Team and when our Navy and Marine Corps are doing their jobs they are usually a long way from home. It is good and fitting, and very proper, that we take this opportunity when they are home, in one of the very few times that they are able to assemble here, that we thank them. We thank them for their presence, we thank them for their service, we thank them for their sacrifice that they and they families make. And we thank them for keeping us safe every single day and night.

Now it is time to place this ship in commission, so this crew can take her to sea, so they can defend our nation, just as their predecessors have for 237 years.

From the Navy, Semper Fortis. Always Courageous.