



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
USS America Commissioning
San Francisco, California
Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr.
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As prepared for delivery**

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, Sailors of USS America – good morning!

While I was having a cup of coffee this morning across the street, a lady came up to me, very excited, and said “You must be Captain Hall.” Well, what can I say?

What a great Navy day, as we gather together during San Francisco Fleet Week, just two days before our Navy celebrates its 239th birthday, and to commission our nation’s newest warship...a great Navy day indeed.

I’ve always found the citizens of the Bay Area to be such gracious hosts, and I’m honored to be here with you to help celebrate this region’s history of military service and maritime tradition as we commission this great ship, the USS America.

As I look around I realize there are so many distinguished guests that it would take a whole hour just to name them, so I won’t, but I do want to acknowledge a few: Secretary Schultz; Secretary Mabus; Congressmen Rogers and Amodei; Mayor Lee; Assistant Secretary Stackley; some of our industry partners, including Mr. Brian Cuccias (vice president of Huntington Ingalls Industry and president of Ingalls Shipbuilding) and Mr. Frederick Hoffmeyer (LHA 6 Program manager’s representative supervisor of shipbuilding, Gulf Coast).

American industry builds great ships. If you think about it for a moment, the last captain of this ship is likely not yet born. That is a return on investment.

And of course Mrs. Lynn Pace, the ship’s sponsor, and Tiffany Marie Pace, the maid of honor, and I’m betting former chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Peter Pace, is here somewhere as well.

Admiral Brown, Admiral Hilarides, Admiral Mackay, General Berger, fellow flag and general officers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

On behalf of the chief of naval operations, I’d like to thank everyone involved in today’s commissioning ceremony. We can’t thank you enough for all the great work you’ve done. It’s important work, and it matters.

I want to commend Captain Bob Hall and the entire crew of this great ship for their tremendous work throughout acceptance trials, and then sailing her around the Americas to arrive here in San Francisco for this, her big day.

I had the great pleasure to be aboard America during its recent port call in Chile, and I’m proud to say that you all are living up to the ship’s motto, “prepared in war or in peace.”

That’s important, because we live in an uncertain world where conflict and crisis can arise at any time. And as our nation conducts a strategic rebalance to the Pacific, warships like USS America and the magnificent Sailors and Marines who man her will be needed now more than ever.

Ladies and gentlemen, I love a microphone and I could go on and on, but I won't, because our guest speaker, a man who speaks with much more eloquence, much more clarity and much more gravitas than I ever could will address this more fully.

I have the easy job today, I get to introduce the guest speaker. But my challenge is to quickly convey to you the nature of man who is our Secretary of the Navy, without taking the easy way out and simply reading his bio. You can read his bio, and I encourage you to do so. But wait until he's finished speaking, so you don't miss some important learning.

So, way back in the 8th century B.C., King Gordius of Phrygia tied his oxcart to a post using a complicated knot. This was long before auto locks, the club, or even car alarms. If you didn't want it stolen, you had to tie it down. I bet you're wondering where this is going!

Now this knot was so complex, that it became legend that whoever could open Gordius' knot – the Gordian Knot – would become king of all Asia. No need to get out the vote, no elections, just open a knot and congratulations, it's good to be king.

Lots of people tried, lots of people failed, until in 333 B.C. along comes Alexander the Great, who decided to give it a go.

Now ol' Alex worked it hard but he couldn't untie it either. Finally he realized he was going about it the old way, so he drew his sword and with one stroke, he cut the Gordian Knot in half: an innovative solution to a seemingly impossible problem.

So, what does cutting the Gordian Knot have to do with our guest speaker? Well, let me tell you all about it.

Back in the 1980s, Secretary Mabus had a desire to help the people of his home state of Mississippi. He could have volunteered in a number of different ways, but he came up with a truly bold solution, and at age 39, he became the youngest governor of the state in 150 years.

Unafraid to tackle the toughest challenges, he focused his efforts on growing the state economy, improving education and cutting through the many obstacles in his path.

During the 1990s he was appointed as ambassador to Saudi Arabia, where he helped defuse a border crisis with Yemen, dealt with terrorist attacks and international child abductions: some monumentally difficult problems that he sliced through.

And he's still cutting through barriers, bureaucracy, baloney, and B.S.

In these times of shrinking budgets, increasing fuel costs and higher carbon emissions, he's leading our Navy-Marine Corps team, and our nation, really, in energy reform.

Thanks to his vision, we're using biofuels to demonstrate our Great Green Fleet. We have energy-saving hybrid propulsion systems, like the one that drives USS America here, and we're harnessing the power of the sun and wind to generate energy for our shore installations.

He's solving complex problems as our nation rebalances to the Indo-Asia-Pacific and as we continue to confront challenges in the Middle East.

While our Navy's stretched a bit thin, we meet all our obligations around the world because he's unwilling to accept the usual paradigm of doing more with less, instead, he's found a way to do more with more.

If ever-there-was a modern-day Gordian Knot, it's our acquisition process. But because we have the right leader at the helm, our Navy-Marine Corps team is upgrading technology, developing unmanned systems, and growing our fleet to meet our global commitments. We have 65 ships currently under contract and will have a Navy of over 310 ships by the end of the decade. So expect to see a lot more ships commissioned in the future.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's no exaggeration, that our Navy and Marine Corps team is on the right course and speed because of our Secretary's ability to find innovative solutions to the difficult problems of the day.

So please join me in welcoming a true visionary, the 75th Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Ray Mabus.