



Photo courtesy of General Dynamics Electric Boat

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Missouri Keel Authentication Ceremony
September 27, 2008
Remarks

Thanks, John, and good morning, Mrs. Gates, Congressman Skelton, Senator Reed, Senator Whitehouse, Congressman Langevin, Congressman Carnahan, Admiral Donald, Admiral Donnelly, Admiral Hilarides – and all the distinguished platform guests – and to everyone in our audience.

First, to all the elected officials and those here today from the Department of Defense and our Navy customer community – in the words of the St. Louis native Yogi Berra – “I want to thank you for making this day necessary.”

It really is a great pleasure for me to represent the thousands of talented shipbuilders of Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding – and particularly those at Newport News – who are helping to build this wonderful submarine Missouri.

As the brochure for today’s ceremony mentions, the name Missouri is a much storied name for ships – and Newport News Shipbuilding lays claim to building the first battleship named Missouri – BB 11.

She was commissioned in 1903 and sailed as part of President Roosevelt’s Great White Fleet.

We also built the passenger liner St. Louis in 1910, the cruiser USS St. Louis in 1939 and the amphibious cargo ship USS St. Louis in 1969.

More recently, we built the Los Angeles-class submarine, USS Jefferson City, named after the capital of the 24th state and commissioned in 1992.

And I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the aircraft carrier, CVN 75, Harry S. Truman, named for one of Missouri’s most beloved sons.

Now, we all know that Missouri is a land-locked state.

Yet its name, and the names of its cities and sons, appears time and again in the pages of naval history.

Perhaps it was predestined.

The state is named after the Missouri River, which in turn is named after a Native American Indian tribe whose name means “those who have dugout canoes.”

So you see, ships were part of Missouri’s history from its very inception.

A much more known fact is the state’s official nickname which – as John mentioned earlier – is the “Show Me” state.

This is a nod to the historically stalwart and skeptical thinkers in Missouri.

And early in the Virginia-class program, we certainly encountered a lot of skepticism.

The teaming between General Dynamics Electric Boat and Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding at Newport News was revolutionary in the industry.

Any kind of revolution results in a segment of the population who stand back and say “show me.”

With the Virginia class, there were those who doubted whether two companies who competed vigorously against each other for decades could really team together.

As the teaming progressed, others were skeptical about our ability to build these ships with increasing efficiency and affordability.

And in the recent past, some doubted whether we would ever get close to a \$2 billion ship.

Well, I think we can officially nickname the Virginia-class program the “We showed them” program.

We showed them the benefits of ship after ship production with a stable design.

We showed them how perseverance and a focus on commitments results in a more efficiently built and cost effective product.

We showed them how the true spirit of the inventor – always trying to make it better and never settling for good when excellence is in reach – is an intrinsic part of the people who build and operate these ships.

This is the seventh keel authentication ceremony for a Virginia-class ship and during these ceremonies – we rightly mention teamwork and the power of these shipbuilders working together.

These men and women invented a new way of building submarines.

They came together, along with our Navy customer, and had challenges we could not have foretold when we started out on this journey together.

And although challenges remain- it's the nature of the art of shipbuilding – I would say that the Virginia-class submarine program is the most successful program in shipbuilding today.

I would add that it's also part of what makes America great.

The engineer, designer, welder, pipefitter, financial analyst, inspector, rigger – the supply officer, navigator, chief of the boat, executive officer, sonar man – they know that what they do is part of something much bigger than themselves.

They know they are building and serving aboard ships that make us a stronger and more prepared nation in a world of uncertainty.

Another Missouri son, the writer Samuel Clemens, also known as Mark Twain, said in 1890, “We are called the nation of inventors. And we are. We could still claim that title – and wear its loftiest honors – if we had stopped with the first thing we ever invented – which was human liberty.”

Yet we didn't stop.

And today marks another day we show how something we invented continues to protect this human liberty so central to America.

It's a very special day indeed – and we're most proud to be part of it.

Thank you.