Sailors react to 21st century Sailor, Marine initiative

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NORFOLK, Va. (NNS) -- The secretary of the Navy held an all hands call aboard *USS Bataan* (LHD 5) which was televised and streamed live on the web to the fleet March 5, announcing the establishment of the 21st Century Sailor and Marine initiative.

Secretary Ray Mabus explained that the initiative consolidates a set of objectives and policies, new and existing, to maximize Sailor and Marine personal readiness. The programs are divided into five categories or areas; readiness, safety, physical fitness, inclusion, and continuum of service.

"The new defense strategy will put increased responsibilities on the Navy and Marine Corps in the years to come," the secretary said. "You are the department's most essential asset, and it is the duty of the department's leadership to do all we can to provide each individual Sailor and Marine with the resources to maintain that resiliency."

For Sailors in attendance, the message was clear. Logistics Specialist 2nd Class Jessica Vestal from Bataan said she left the all hands call feeling excited for the future of the Navy.

"I thought the new initiatives really show how far the Navy has come," said Vestal. "We, as Sailors, need all the support we can get, and I feel like I heard a lot today that will have a real deckplate impact."

Various programs fall under the readiness area, all of which help ensure we have the most mentally prepared service members and family in department history. Continued emphasis on the responsible use of alcohol, zero tolerance for drug use, suicide reduction, family and personal preparedness, and financial and family stability all work together to prepare Sailors, Marines and their families for the challenges that they may face and reinforce healthy alternatives on liberty or off-duty. A new initiative will include breathalyzer tests when Sailors stationed onboard ships, submarines and at squadrons report for duty and randomly elsewhere to reduce the occurrence of alcohol related incidents that can end careers and sometimes end lives.

Gas Turbine Systems Technician 2nd Class Eric Smith from Assault Craft Unit 4 said the new initiatives were a welcome continuation of policies already in place.

Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) the Honorable Ray Mabus answers questions during all-hands call aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Bataan (LHD 5) at Naval Station Norfolk March 5. Mabus was in Norfolk to unveil a new initiative designed to maximize Sailor and Marine personal readiness, build resiliency and hone the most combat effective force in the history of the Department of Navy. Following his remarks, Mabus and Navy and Marine Corps senior leadership answered questions from the audience, as well as questions from those watching throughout the Fleet.
U.S. Navy photo by MCC Sam Shavers

"We have been moving towards a cleaner, smarter Navy, and I would tell my guys that this is just one more step towards that goal," said Smith. "If you aren't right, now is definitely the time to get right."

In addition to ensuring the readiness of our Sailors and Marines, the initiative will aim to make the Navy and Marine Corps the safest and most secure force in the department's history. All personnel in the fleet should expect to work in a safe environment, free from harassment or hazards, and when confronted with these, have the resources available to immediately correct the problem.

The Department of the Navy (DoN) continues to work aggressively to prevent sexual assaults, to support sexual assault victims, and to hold offenders accountable. Part of this effort is implementing new training at multiple levels in both the Navy and Marine Corps.

"I was very encouraged to see the Navy and Marine Corps taking the lead on sexual assault prevention" said Vestal. "I've long been an advocate for the program and I think it's very encouraging that the Sailors coming in to the navy will find it to be a great working environment."

While each of the five areas provide important support for department personnel, physical fitness can be viewed having some of the farthest reaching beneficial effects. Sailors and Marines must be ready to meet the demands of performing in a tactical environment, and physical readiness is a crucial link to ensuring Sailors and Marines are ready to take on the challenges the Navy and Marine Corps faces today, and will face in the future.

Ensuring all personnel, regardless of race or gender, are given every opportunity to excel and succeed is the hallmark of the program's forth area, inclusion. In order to operate globally, the Department of the Navy will need diversity of ideas, experiences, areas of expertise, and backgrounds to fulfill a variety of missions, while remaining relevant to the American people.

A new DoN Diversity Office will be established, with the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) serving as the DoN's diversity officer. The Diversity Office will leverage, coordinate and formalize ongoing efforts within the Navy and Marine Corps and will include the heads of the Navy Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Marine Corps Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management and the DoN Office of Civilian Diversity as team members.

The final area, continuum of service, aims to ensure Sailors and Marines are provided the most transition support in department history. Whether retraining wounded warriors, providing voluntary education, or helping achieve civilian credentialing, the department will aim to provide personnel every opportunity for personal and professional growth.

Aviation Ordnanceman 1st Class Thomas Monfett from Bataan said he hoped to see his junior Sailors take advantage of the new programs.

"I always tell my guys get what they can out of their time in the Navy," said Monfett. "From stopping smoking to getting in shape, these new programs are going to offer ways for Sailors to better themselves and their families. I think it's great."