Navy commits to renewable energy takes nation's center stage

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WASHINGTON (NNS) – The Department of the Navy's energy security goals, including its efforts to produce or consume one gigawatt of new, renewable energy on its naval installations was one of two U.S. Navy highlights during President Barack Obama's State of the Union address Jan. 24.

"I'm proud to announce that the Department of Defense, the world's largest consumer of energy, will make one of the largest commitments to clean energy in history - with the Navy purchasing enough capacity to power a quarter of a million homes a year," Obama said.

This initiative continues progress toward the five energy goals outlined in 2009 by the Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Ray Mabus, the broadest goal being by no later than 2020, at least half of all Navy energy, afloat and ashore, would come from non-traditional sources.

"Changing the way we get and use energy is a priority for the Navy because energy security is critical to our national security," Mabus said. "One gigawatt of renewable energy produced from sources like solar, wind, and geothermal could power a city the size of Orlando, Florida, while increasing the security and flexibility of the energy grid."

Secretary Mabus has established a "1 GW Task Force" to assess and select renewable energy projects that will achieve this goal. The Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations and Environment (EI&E), the Honorable Jackalyne Pfannenstiel, will chair the task force.

The Navy has implemented a variety of energy initiatives in pursuit of that goal, including using advanced drop-in biofuel to power the fleet and renewable energy to power naval installations. All of which is part of Obama's blueprint for a secure energy future.

Jackalyne Pfannenstiel, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations and Environment, third from left, and distinguished Navy leadership, break ground for the Navy's newest solar farm at Naval Weapons Station China Lake. The 118-acre solar farm is expected to generate more than 30 percent of the facility's energy requirements.
U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Josh Cassatt

The other Navy highlight from the president's address to the nation was at the end of his speech when he referred to the U.S. Navy SEALs' successful mission against Osama Bin Laden.

Haney, cont. from pg. 4

"As the magnitude of this epic disaster reached an unprecedented scale of any of our experience, my senior staff implored me to assign our senior most joint warfighting commander to lead the U.S. response. That morning Admiral Pat Walsh assembled elements of his joint task force staff and prepared to depart for Japan," said Willard. "Everyday I observed Pat's organization, initiative, imagination and drive to provide General Oriki (Japan Joint Staff) and his forces every service they required, including nuclear engineering expertise on an unprecedented scale. Such leadership will never be forgotten in Japan nor in the Pacific Fleet, that is the legacy of Admiral Pat "Sponge" Walsh."

In his remarks, Walsh spoke of the important role maritime forces play in the vast Pacific Fleet area of responsibility, and the U.S. Navy's commitment to that role.

"In this region, sea power is an essential element of national power," said Walsh. "In the Pacific Century, sea power resumes its traditional role in the sea-lines of communication. It's an instrument of peace; it's an instrument of stability; it's a protector of trade and development."He warned that other nations are gauging our commitment, particularly in light of budget constraints.

"They are watching with keen interest the effect of the U.S. economic challenges, the strain of more than a decade of war on the Navy's ability to remain forward, to remain engaged and ready," said Walsh.

But he stressed that the Navy has overcome such challenges before and remains committed to maintaining regional stability.

"Let's be very clear: we have been here before," said Walsh. "We have faced austere economic cycles in the past. And while the American public has kept faith with the Navy, they have not changed their view of our mission or their expectations of our response to crisis conditions."

Walsh, who is retiring after 34 years in the Navy, is confident in Haney's capabilities and leadership.

"If ever there were a person who's ready for the challenge to assume command of the Pacific Fleet with all its complexities, with all of its challenges and who has worked and held critical leadership positions at every level, it's Cecil Haney," said Walsh.

After reading his orders and assuming command, Haney thanked "our international allies and partners and our local community for (their) enduring relationship with the U.S. Navy" and expressed enthusiasm about his tour at Pacific Fleet.

"I look forward to getting acquainted with you and building on the foundation of trust and mutual respect that Admiral Walsh has nurtured," Haney said. "The U.S. Navy has been a dutiful servant of the nation and its people, and a champion of freedom, security and prosperity abroad. In the Pacific, our history is rich and we have played an integral role in furthering those principles to better the lives of others."

Haney said he will work with the other military services to support U.S. Pacific Command to enhance "maritime security and freedom of the seas with the talented men and women of Pacific Fleet and our allies and partners."

Haney said he is "most grateful to Admiral Walsh for his unparalleled leadership of Pacific Fleet and tireless efforts strengthening critical ties to enhance security of the region" as well as the Sailors "headquartered here and on station across the Pacific (who) performed remarkably across a wide spectrum of our Navy's mission areas."

Haney is the 33rd naval officer to command the Pacific Fleet since it was established in February 1941 with headquarters at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. A graduate of the United States Naval Academy with a bachelor's of science degree in oceanic engineering, Haney is also a recipient of the Vice Admiral James Stockdale Leadership Award for 1998.

The world's largest fleet command, U.S. Pacific Fleet encompasses 100 million square miles from the west coast of the United States into the Indian Ocean. The Pacific Fleet consists of approximately 180 ships, nearly 2,000 aircraft and 125,000 Sailors, Marines and civilians. U.S. Pacific Fleet staff report administratively to the Chief of Naval Operations and operationally to U.S. Pacific Command, whose headquarters are at Camp H.M. Smith.

Pioneer, cont. from pg. 4

"I served on several ships with her, and she was one of my best friends ever," he said. "She was the emcee at my commissioning and one of my mentors when I became an officer. She was an amazing human being and one of the best ABs I've ever known. She had to overcome some hurdles that we as males did not, and I always respected her for that."

"The AB community lost not only a great person but a great AB and one of my personal friends," Castillo added. "She truly will be missed. This tragedy happened because she was trying to help somebody else. She'd take the shirt off her back to give to someone in need. She gave a lot to the community, and she gave a lot to the young ABs in hopes that one would take her spot."

Carl Vinson and CVW-17 are conducting maritime theater security operations in U.S. 5th Fleet area of responsibility.