

Navy Secretary unveils plans for Green Fleet

Written by Jim Logan

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Calling for a “Green Fleet,” U.S. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus outlined an ambitious goal to use non-fossil fuels to produce half of the energy for the U.S. Navy’s sea and shore vehicles at an Oct. 22 event in Santa Barbara.

In a speech hosted by the Santa Barbara Council of the Navy League at the Dreier Building in Santa Barbara, Mabus noted that the Department of Defense accounts for 93 percent of the federal government’s energy consumption. Greening the Navy and Marine Corps’ energy sources will go a long way toward weaning the country off costly fossil fuels produced in “volatile” regions, he said.

Mabus acknowledged that the Navy’s technology and infrastructure aren’t mature enough to handle the job now. But history has shown that both tend to catch up to the Navy’s demand, Mabus said, citing the moves from wind to coal and steam to oil. “If the Navy comes, they will build it,” he said.

Mabus said a variety of alternative sources — ethanol, biofuels, fuel cells and more — will be needed to achieve the Navy’s goals. The service already runs its submarines and most of ships with nuclear power.

He cited the USS Makin Island as an example of the Navy’s move in that direction. The ship, based in San Diego, is the service’s first hybrid vessel, using a combination of gas turbines and electric drive.

Mabus conceded that creating the Green Fleet is a daunting undertaking but expressed confidence that innovation and the technology will come through.

“The Navy, we have never backed down from a challenge, and we’re not going to back down today,” Mabus told the gathering.

Attendee David W. Hardee, chief executive officer of Clairvoyant Energy, said he was certain Mabus’ goal was feasible, despite the current lack of solutions. He offered a telecommunications



analogy.

“We skipped hard (telephone) land lines in Third World countries and went straight to cell phones,” Hardee said.