

National Capital Commandery

Secretary of the Navy Carlos del Toro Speaks at National Press Club

On 21 February, companions Captain Bill Steagall, Captain John Rodgaard, Mr. Peter Pennington, and Dr. Judy Pearson attended the monthly Headliners Luncheon at the National Press Club, Washington DC in honor of the featured speaker, our Naval Order companion, Secretary of the Navy, Carlos del Toro. Also present at our table was Dr. Jennifer London, the widow of Dr. Jack London, a past Dewey award recipient and life member of the Naval Order.

SECNAV del Toro spoke to a room of about 80 former and active senior naval and marine officers, together with several naval/military attachés and members of the Washington, DC press corps. He said that he was honored to speak to the press, because the media is an essential element of democracy; they hold our leaders accountable. He told the audience that after WWII, the US emerged as the dominant naval power that rewrote the laws on the uses of world's oceans. "The US has guaranteed freedom by securing sea lanes throughout the world."

The SECNAV described the growing challenges to world security posed by threats to navigation of the world's oceans – not only from piracy, but from totalitarian regimes such as the People's Republic of China. He emphasized the value of international alliances in the face of Russia's "unconscionable" invasion of Ukraine. He reminded his audience that the US has given/pledged fifty-billion dollars in assistance to Ukraine. Where there is trouble in the world, Navy Carrier Strike groups are in the region to establish a US presence.

Del Toro made the point that the US must maintain a navy that can meet today's global challenges, from adversaries and environmental crises. He spoke of the need to "adapt a balanced, rational approach to the challenges we face. We must be always be prepared for any contingency." The US Navy and Marine Corps, he said, are "the most capable and lethal naval force in the world."

Describing the Navy's infrastructure optimization program, he mentioned a newly-formed task force in Bahrain, a new naval base in Japan, and the next generation of guided missile destroyers and nuclear attack submarines. The Navy is modernizing shipyards and dry docks. "Sailors and Marines are working every day to protect American lives and interests."

The SECNAV listed several ways in which American citizens can support our naval forces. One way is through "continued faith in American values." He gave recognition to former president James Carter, once a naval officer, who, as of this writing, has entered hospice care.

A lively Q&A followed del Toro's speech. In his responses to questions from the audience, he touched on the challenge of recruitment for a volunteer military, during a time of low unemployment. Additionally, he stated that the Department of the Navy must work with Congress to support legal immigration to bring in vital workers for shipyards and shipbuilding enterprise. To have a "larger navy and a more modern fleet," the US must invest in shipbuilding facilities, R&D, science and technology, strategy, space technology, and cyber security.

He closed with his three guiding principles: Maintaining a modern naval force and infrastructure, strengthening partnerships with our allies, and "creating a culture of warfighter excellence."

Submitted by Judy Pearson, Ph.D.