

Navy to Christen Expeditionary Fast Transport Puerto Rico

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy will christen its newest Expeditionary Fast Transport, the future USNS Puerto Rico (T-EPF 11), during a ceremony Nov. 10 at the Austal USA shipyard in Mobile, Alabama, the Defense Department said in a release.

The principal speaker is congresswoman Jenniffer González-Colón, resident commissioner of Puerto Rico. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor will serve as the ship's sponsor. In a time-honored Navy tradition, she will christen the ship by breaking a bottle of sparkling wine across the bow.

"This ship honors the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the contributions Puerto Ricans have made to our nation and Navy and Marine Corps team," said Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer. "USNS Puerto Rico will provide our commanders high-speed sealift mobility and agility and I am thankful for this ship, her crew, and our industrial force teammates whose service makes this great ship possible."

The future USNS Puerto Rico will be the first active ship in naval service to honor the island in the West Indies east of Hispaniola. An Alaska-class cruiser named Puerto Rico was authorized July 19, 1940, but construction was canceled June 24, 1943.

With an all-aluminum shallow-draft hull, the EPF is a commercial-based catamaran capable of intra-theater personnel and cargo lift providing combatant commanders high-speed sealift mobility with inherent cargo handling capability and agility to achieve positional advantage over operational distances.

EPF-class ships are designed to transport 600 short tons of military cargo 1,200 nautical miles at an average speed of 35 knots. The ship is capable of operating in shallow-draft ports and waterways, interfacing with roll-on/roll-off discharge facilities, and on/off-loading a combat-loaded Abrams main battle tank (M1A2).

The EPF includes a flight deck for helicopter operations and an off-load ramp that will allow vehicles to quickly drive off the ship. EPF's shallow draft (under 15 feet) further enhances littoral operations and port access.

The EPF program delivered its ninth ship late last year, USNS City of Bismarck (T-EPF 9), with delivery of USNS Burlington (EPF 10) planned for mid-November. Puerto Rico and Newport (EPF 12) are currently under construction at Austal's shipyard.