

United States Senate Appropriations Subcommittee

**Hearing on: Coast Guard Operations in the Arctic
Monday Aug 6, 2012**

Location: Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak

Witness: Admiral Robert J. Papp, Jr., Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard

Good morning, Chairman Landrieu and Senator Murkowski. It is great to be in back in Alaska for the third year in row and outside of Washington D.C.! I want to thank you for your continuing support for our Coast Guard – especially our hard working Coast Guard men and women. As I've stated before, it is my highest honor to lead and represent them, and I want to thank Captain Wolozinski the Base Commander and Captain Rivera the Air Station Commander and all my Coasties in Kodiak for their hospitality.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today, and the chance this week to show you those hard-working men and women in action. It's important to see and hear first hand what its like to live and serve in one of our most extreme and challenging areas of Coast Guard operations. I visited our Base in Ketchikan (and attended the local Blueberry Festival) on Saturday – the 222nd birthday of the Coast Guard. We traveled to Barrow yesterday and observed Coast Guard operations in the difficult conditions that exist 300 miles north of the Arctic Circle. Later this week we'll visit Cold Bay and fly offshore to visit the Coast Guard Cutter BERTHOFF – our first National Security Cutter, commissioned four years ago this week – and watch her crew in operation.

I can report that our Coast Guard is on station and ready to meet today's traditional mission demands, like protecting Alaska's 3.1 billion dollar fishing industry while we also prepare for the future. Activity in the most remote reaches of Alaska continues to evolve and grow – including planned drilling operations in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas; foreign tankers using the northern sea routes which transit through the Bering Sea and small cruise ships pressing even further into the Arctic. We must continue to work to refine our ability to provide – and then support – a persistent operational presence during periods of increasing human activity or environmental risk.

That's why Operation Arctic Shield and our expanding work in the Arctic is so important. During this 9-month operation, we have deployed a National Security Cutter

– the BERTHOLF – and two of our 225-foot ocean going, ice capable buoy tenders. We have also repositioned two helicopters to Barrow. We will test and deploy the Spilled Oil Recovery System for the first time north of the Arctic Circle and will continue to examine the requirements to protect living marine resources in the higher latitudes. We will also continue to evaluate the best methods by which to manage the waterways in this area.

Given the challenges of operating in this region, we know we can't do all of this alone. This will take a whole-of-government approach and we are working closely with other federal, state, local and tribal partners.

We must also carefully consider the resource requirements needed to sustain operations in this environment. I am reminded of the earliest days of our operations in Alaska. The cutters and other government vessel plying these waters – when they were not under sail – were fueled by coal. I've seen reports where vessels had to mine their own coal from the veins accessible on the cliffs near Unalaska – because the infrastructure to provide coal to power the ships was not available. Coal mined by the crews was then transported by small boats through the dangerous surf to the ships anchored off shore. Eventually, as human activity and presence increased, coal depots were built to provide greater ability to sustain those ships, along with more robust shore stations to provide support for the crews.

We still have limited infrastructure today, but we have an advantage over our predecessors. We now have remarkably capable cutters able to operate off-shore with great endurance and autonomy. Thanks to your continuing support and that of the Administration, we are currently building a capable off-shore “infrastructure” – our National Security Cutters – and they don't rely on a ready supply of coal to conduct their mission. These cutters can carry all of the supplies they need to provide a sustained presence, can carry and launch small boats and helicopters to conduct the full range of Coast Guard missions, and can provide a robust suite of communications capabilities. That is why completion of the National Security Cutter fleet is critical to our ability to meet our expanding missions. You'll see BERTHOLF on Tuesday and will experience first hand her tremendous capabilities.

Additionally, with the support of congress and the Administration, we are making smart investments now with the FY13 budget to ensure we are ready to operate effectively in Arctic in the future. The FY13 budget provides funding to expand and upgrade the aviation facilities at Cold Bay – which you will also see this week – and initiates

acquisition of a new polar class icebreaker. The budget also provides operational funding for our medium polar icebreaker HEALY and reactivates POLAR STAR, returning her back to full operating capability in 2013.

We remain committed to Alaska – as borne out by our investments in the future and our operations today.

Finally, I cannot forget our hard working Coast Guardsmen and families who serve here – many in remote locations.

My wife Linda and I are focused on housing and child-care services for our families. Linda personally met with housing offices here and in Ketchikan. In Cordova we recently constructed 26 brand new homes to help alleviate a housing shortage there. I am committed to providing for the needs of the 1,600 Coast Guard active duty families stationed throughout Alaska, and we appreciate your continued support along with the Administration, in making the welfare of our families a top priority.

In the Coast Guard, we work as a crew – but we serve as a family. We will continue to find the balance between maintaining operations, recapitalizing our fleet and ensuring the needs of our Coast Guard families are being met.

Conclusion:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.