

**TESTIMONY OF  
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**ON COAST GUARD OPERATIONS IN THE ARCTIC  
BEFORE THE HOUSE TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION**

**DECEMBER 1, 2011**

Good morning Chairman Lobiondo, Ranking Member Larsen, and Representative Young.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today – and for your continued support for our Coast Guard – especially for our hard working Coast Guard men and women. It is my highest honor to lead and represent them.

America is a maritime Nation. The United States relies on the sea for our prosperity, trade, transportation and security. We are also an Arctic nation.

The Arctic region—including the Beaufort, Chukchi, and Bering Seas – and the Arctic Ocean—is truly an emerging maritime frontier.

Although the northern part of the Arctic has remained frozen much of our lifetimes, change is clearly occurring. Arctic ice is gradually diminishing – and in summer months an entire new ocean is emerging. This accessibility is spurring an increase in human activities such as natural resource exploration, shipping and ecotourism.

Similar to the rest of U.S. waters, the safety, security and stewardship of the Arctic region impacts every American.

Indeed, the Arctic contains an estimated 22% of the world's technically recoverable oil and natural gas. The Shell Exploration and Production Company plans to drill exploratory wells in the Chukchi Sea and Beaufort Sea beginning in 2012 – other companies will likely follow.

For more than 221 years, our Nation has relied upon the U.S. Coast Guard to protect those on the sea, protect the country against threats delivered by sea, and even to protect the sea itself.

Our challenge today is to ensure we are working to develop a Coast Guard capable of meeting our new and emerging responsibilities in the Arctic region as capably as we perform our long established missions in existing areas of operation.

As with any new endeavor, posturing our forces to do so presents challenges, risks, and opportunities. Today, based upon what we have learned, I'm pleased to offer you my best military advice on our Arctic operational needs.

Before I do so, however, I must tell you I am concerned by recent Authorization language passed by the House that limits my ability to move the Coast Guard forward on all mission fronts, including those emerging in the Arctic.

My first concern is the mandate<sup>1</sup> to decommission the *Polar Star*. This provision would eliminate the Nation's only existing heavy icebreaking capability potentially as soon as 2 years after *Polar Star's* reactivation (in 2013)... and, after the Congress invested over \$60 Million dollars to extend the cutter's service life. Admittedly, keeping this 30+ year old ship running is a bridging strategy – not a long-term solution for the Nation's heavy ice breaking needs.

While I can understand the desire to accelerate a solution, I do not see an alternate source of U.S. heavy ice breaking capability that could be made available within the next 3 years. Thus, this mandate puts us in a position of confronting expanding Arctic missions without a heavy icebreaker.

We have weathered the last couple years without an active heavy icebreaker. I strongly recommend against making this situation permanent – and I urge reconsideration of this provision (Section 307) during conference.

My second concern is the Authorization bill's mandates constraining our ability to procure the National Security Cutters just as we have stabilized costs and matured their design. While I understand and share the committee's desire to deliver the most capable and effective replacement for the 12 High Endurance Cutters, I cannot see how technically challenging and disruptive performance milestones in law achieve this. The NSC is a stable and successful acquisition program now managed by some of the best acquisition professionals in the Federal government. This legislation risks disrupting the production schedule, raising costs and jeopardizing the entire NSC project.

And I would state here today that the National Security Cutter is more important to me to carrying out Coast Guard missions in Alaska – but we still need new icebreakers as well.

In sum, it is my judgment and advice to you that POLAR STAR must be kept as part of the heavy icebreaker bridging strategy for the next 5 to 10 years, and that the NSC shipbuilding program momentum must be maintained.

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<sup>1</sup> H.R. 2838, Sec. 307. Decommissionings.

- (a) POLAR SEA. – Not later than 6 months after the date of enactment of this Act, the Commandant of the Coast Guard shall decommission the USCGC POLAR SEA (WAGB 11).
- (b) POLAR STAR. – Not later than 3 years after the date of enactment of this Act, the Commandant of the Coast Guard shall decommission the USCGC POLAR STAR (WAGB 10).

The Coast Guard is no stranger to Arctic waters – we have operated in the Arctic for most of our history. The majority of our Arctic operations are concentrated in the southern Arctic, or Bering Sea, where we protect the fish stocks and fisherman. Protecting one of the world's richest biomasses, those who make their living harvesting it, and other shippers who transit through its often treacherous waters, creates a persistent demand for Coast Guard services. We understand and we have the experience to meet these challenging maritime missions – resourcing them will be another story.

But we've also been actively gathering information about operating above the Arctic Circle in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas, as we prepare for a gradual northerly expansion in demand for our services in ice diminished Arctic waters.

For the past 3 years we have conducted seasonal cutter, small boat and helicopter operations— along with bi-weekly Arctic Ocean flights. This year we are organizing a major operation in the 17<sup>th</sup> Coast Guard District in anticipation of drilling in the Chukchi Sea.

This operation will feature a mix of flight deck equipped cutters, sea-going buoy tenders, fixed wing aircraft and helicopters, and communications and support infrastructure.

I have made it a priority to personally travel to Alaska the past two summers—with DHS leaders and interagency leaders like Department of Interior Secretary Salazar, Deputy Secretary David Hayes, to meet with our local and state partners...including Governor Parnell, and Lt. Governor Treadwell who is here today, Alaska Native Tribes, and industry, and to see the challenges we are confronting first-hand.

In the Beaufort and the Chukchi seas, we are now seeing a gradual transition from very limited, episodic demand into a more sustained seasonal demand.

At some point, these demands may evolve into full-fledged seasonal operations.

Therefore, our present operational concept is largely an extension of our current posture – a mobilization of sea-based command and control forward operating bases, from which we will conduct operations with gradually increasing support from our shore-based aircraft.

Should a national incident arise in the Arctic, we will mobilize the entire inventory of Coast Guard assets. We will accomplish the mission – just as we always have during our more than two centuries of service to the Nation.

But to fulfill this promise to America, our heroic Coast Guard men and women need, and frankly they deserve, the modern assets to get their job done.

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

*Semper Paratus.*