

**United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation  
Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard**

**Hearing on: Defending U.S. Economic Interests in the Changing Arctic:  
Is There a Strategy?**

**Wednesday Jul 27, 2011, 10 a.m.  
Location: Russell 253**

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

Good morning, Chairman Begich and Ranking Member Snowe. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you once again – and for your continuing support for our Coast Guard – and especially our hard working Coast Guard men and women. As I've stated previously, it is my highest honor to lead and represent them.

America is a maritime Nation. Most of our citizens are keenly aware of the importance of our oceans.

But America is also an Arctic Nation. However, few Americans outside Alaska are aware that we are also an Arctic nation—largely because the Northern Arctic waters have been frozen and inaccessible. But rapid change is occurring -- Arctic ice is diminishing – and in summer months an entire new ocean is emerging. These new waters are spurring an increase in human activities such as natural resource exploration, shipping, and ecotourism.

For more than 221 years, our Nation has relied upon the U.S. Coast Guard to protect those on the sea, protect against threats delivered by sea, and even to protect the sea itself. Our challenge today is to ensure we have a Coast Guard capable of meeting these same responsibilities in this new sea.

However, posturing our force to do so presents many challenges. Operations in the Arctic's extreme cold, darkness and ice-infested waters require specialized equipment, infrastructure and training. Our current Arctic capabilities are very limited. We have only 1 operational ice breaker. We do not have any coastal or shoreside infrastructure. Nor do we have a seasonal base to hanger our aircraft or sustain our crews.

By way of example – after assuming my watch as Commandant last May, one of the first things I did was travel to the Arctic. One of the places I visited – along with Senator Begich – was Barrow – but we did not stay overnight. Next week, I am headed back up to the Arctic – and I will return to Barrow – this time I am planning to remain overnight. But it has been a real challenge to find enough lodging for our small travel party. Imagine if we had to mount a major pollution response—we would have to create our own infrastructure. And, I want to share with you something more relevant – an operational example. Last spring, a Russian ice camp unexpectedly broke up 630 miles north of Point Barrow within the U.S. Search and Rescue Area of Responsibility. Russia sent one of their ice breakers

to respond. If we had been asked to respond, we could not have done so. Indeed, had this been a U.S. team, we would likely have had to request a foreign ice-breaker to conduct the rescue.

This case highlights our need for sufficient Arctic surface capabilities. When weather prevents planes from flying you need ice-capable ships to perform search and rescue...ice capable ships will also be required to conduct any Arctic pollution response.

The threat posed by the increase in Arctic shipping traffic is also very real—and expanding. The use of Russia's Northern Sea Route is increasing.

In 2009, Russian ice breakers escorted the first several ships through the passage. Last year – 2010 – for the first time in modern history the Northern Sea route was completely ice-free – and at least 8 vessels transited through the passage. This year, Russia is planning at least 15 escorts – including six convoys with oil tankers – as well as cargo vessels and bulk tankers.

While this represents a moderate increase in traffic, all vessels sailing the Northern Route exit into the Bering Sea. Therefore, we have undertaken a Bering Strait Port Access Route Study to determine navigational, vessel traffic and other safety requirements. The bottom line is that shipping traffic – through waters containing our richest fisheries – is on the rise.

The Arctic is also rich in natural gas and oil. Oil companies continue to bid on leases in the Beaufort and Chukchi Sea – Royal Dutch Shell is seeking permits to drill 5 exploratory wells in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas – and other oil companies plan to submit exploration plans.

Although private industry may assert they are adequately prepared for a response to a spill, we must determine what response capability our Coast Guard and Nation needs to have so we can mount an adequate response as exploration advances towards production.

Arctic governance is also a challenge. The Law of the Sea Convention has emerged as the governing legal framework. However, the United States is the only Arctic Nation that has yet to accede to the Law of the Sea Treaty. In order to exercise leadership and make our claims to the extended continental shelf – and effectively interact with other Arctic Nations, we urgently need the Senate to accede to the treaty.

Arctic waters are not limited to North of the Bering Strait, but also encompass the Bering Sea north of the Aleutian Islands. Our ability to provide persistent presence and operate in the harsh Bering Sea is essential to protection of our fish stocks, our fisherman and our fishing industry—this is a \$4.6 billion dollar industry that is responsible for thousands of jobs.

Completion of the National Security Cutter fleet – our newest and most capable high-endurance cutters – is vital to our ability to continue this high-seas mission. NSC # 1, Cutter Bertholf, just finished her first Alaska patrol, exhibiting remarkable sea keeping ability that enabled her to launch and recover her boats, boarding teams and helicopters in

sea states that would challenge our legacy cutters. NSC 2 – Waesche is complete and operating; NSC 3 – Stratton – christened by the First Lady in July 2010 is complete and undergoing builder’s trials; steel is being cut on NSC 4; and, we are completing purchase negotiations for NSC 5.

A stable predictable funding strategy for the remaining 3 NSCs will provide incentive to the shipbuilder for advantages in pricing. And we definitely need at least 8 NSCs to preserve our future ability to patrol the high seas—not just in the Bering Sea but also to confront threats in other high-seas approaches such as illicit drug trafficking in the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

You now have in hand our recently completed high latitude study. This is an outstanding, first time, broad based look at all of our missions in the High Latitude regions. This will serve as a building block to help us look strategically at our requirements and risks in what is becoming one of the most important new regions in the world.

The Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology directorate, in cooperation with the U.S. Arctic Research Commission, is also assisting in studying our future needs for Arctic Infrastructure, Communication and Sensors.

In the 1600s the British writer Thomas Fuller declared: “He that will not sail til’ all the dangers are over must never put to sea.”

I’m a sailor...the dangers, risks and challenges of the Arctic exist...it’s time to address them; we must put to sea.

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