



**Opening Statement
Senator Maria Cantwell
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Arctic Opportunities
March 5, 2015**

“Thank you Madam Chair. And thank you for keeping this important and historic hearing on the schedule. Thank you to our constituents who are here to testify.

There is a bit of irony that the backdrop of this hearing is weather. When in fact the changes of weather conditions demands that the United States come up with an Arctic strategy and implement it. So, I’m very grateful that your passion and leadership prevailed here today.

I think the Arctic is something that we can find significant common ground on.

The United States' Arctic strategy is tremendously important to the economy in both Washington and Alaska. And as we've heard from many of our colleagues on the committee. But it is critically important to the United States of America as well. And I think we will hear that from our witnesses today.

I believe we can agree on the fact that:

- Our Coast Guard needs the tools and infrastructure required to operate in the Arctic—which means developing our polar icebreaker fleet.
- We must make strategic investments in Arctic science, which will help us understand the impacts of climate change on Arctic communities; but will also better inform our strategy for dealing with everything from rescue operations to potential oil spills;
- AND I think we can agree that the United States must ratify the Law of the Sea treaty-- which clarifies the rights and responsibilities of nations on our oceans.

The Arctic already contributes a great deal to the American economy; we must have a seat at the table.

The Chinese and the Russians are already aggressive in their resource development in the Arctic area.

And as our climate continues to change, the economic importance of the Arctic will only continue to grow in the years ahead.

This year, the United States assumes the rotating chair of the Arctic Council. In this capacity we have a great opportunity to draw Arctic nations closer together to address a wide range of issues.

The U.S. efforts will hopefully prioritize important efforts in addressing climate change, increasing regional cooperation, and facilitating new and reliable shipping routes.

On January 21st, President Obama issued an executive order to improve coordination and implementation of the United States Arctic strategy.

This order created the Arctic Executive Steering Committee, chaired by the Office of Science and Technology Policy at the White House.

The Steering Committee will help to increase coordination, reduce duplication, and address any potential gaps in implementation. And in my view, the Obama Administration's pursuing of an Arctic strategy not just on paper—but they have to have significant actions proportionate to the challenges and opportunities that we face here, with the Arctic.

That's why I'm so pleased that Admiral Papp is here today, because he fully appreciates the role the Coast Guard plays in the Arctic and will play in the future. And as we evaluate opportunities and challenges that we face in the Arctic, we need to need to make sure the Coast Guard has the adequate resources to meet those missions and do so safely.

Admiral Papp, given his role in signing the Coast Guard Arctic strategy in 2013-- when you served as the 24th Commandant--

gives you, I think, a unique view point on leading this effort for the U.S.

I look forward to hearing your perspective this morning, on your role as the Special Representative for the Arctic and as your time as Commandant of the Coast Guard.

While all icebreaking operations in the Arctic have been delegated to the Coast Guard under the Naval Operations Concept, it is clear that we have not yet provided these men and women with the resources to meet this mission.

According to a 2010 study, the Coast Guard determined that it either needs:

- Three heavy and three medium icebreakers to fulfill its statutory obligations OR
- Six heavy and four medium icebreakers to both meet its statutory obligations AND meet the requirements established under the Naval Operations Concept.

Yet today, the Coast Guard only has two icebreakers in operation – one heavy and one medium. And the medium vessel—the HEALY—is primarily a research vessel.

So madam chair, I know this isn't the Commerce Committee, where we often discuss these issues, but it is very important that we discuss our Arctic strategy. That the United States of America understands it needs to make an investment in ice breakers.

This issue, of lack of resources, is particularly troubling when you consider that Russia currently has 29 operating icebreakers and is in the process of building 8 more.

I found out this morning even India is building an ice breaker.

According to a report the Center for American Progress released this morning quote “Without decisive action to fund and build new heavy icebreakers for the U.S. Coast Guard, the United States puts its environment and national security in harm's way.” Endquote.

The Coast Guard is already spread too thin.

Earlier this year, the POLAR STAR broke through ice to deliver supplies to the American Base in the Arctic, a commercial fishing vessel got stuck in ice nearly 900 miles away.

The POLAR STAR launched an international rescue mission, traveling 860 miles---150 miles required breaking thick Arctic ice. When all was said and done, our Coast Guard rescued 26 people.

I'm very proud of our Coast Guard—especially this crew that calls Seattle home—I am concerned that we only have one heavy icebreaker. What if the POLAR STAR, too, had been stuck?

As the Commandant, Admiral Zukunft said in his state of the Coast Guard address last week, quote “There is no one to rescue the rescuer.” Endquote.

We need to provide the Coast Guard with more resources. And that means more icebreakers.

I'm sure icebreakers are one of the topics we will hear about from a number of our witnesses.

And I'm also pleased to have Dr. Bitz from the University of Washington here today, to talk about the impacts of climate change.

As we'll discuss, we are seeing tremendous impacts on the Arctic region and this is something we need to address in a comprehensive regional policy.

It's also worth noting that last October, Defense Secretary Hagel referred to climate change as a quote "threat multiplier."

These threat impacts include

- Impacts to property from sea level rise and erosion;
- Access to natural resources, including our fisheries,
- How that could impact food security; and

- Further, extreme weather can impact our military readiness, and continue to stretch limited resources.

Warming has serious implications for American national security in the Arctic.

This impact is especially acute because climate change is affecting the Arctic region twice as fast as the Continental United States.

Over 4.5 million square miles of Arctic Sea ice melted between March and September of 2012.

The level of Arctic ice measured in January 2015 was the lowest amount for the month of January in history.

We've already seen significant ways in which climate change is altering life in the Arctic.

Juvenile salmon populations have decreased as they have lost access to traditional food sources under Bering Sea ice.

I'm sure the chair could name many things that are happening-- everything from affecting Alaskan villages to coastal flooding and erosion, to threats to homes.

But, it is also important to note that the impact of melting ice in the Arctic will also have broad national economic implications.

According to a recent report by the National Resources Defense Council, melting ice in the Arctic will have a severe impact on American agriculture in the continental United States.

Kansas, for example, will be four degrees warmer in the winter without Arctic ice – which normally generates cold air masses that slide southward.

Warmer winters are bad for wheat farmers, who need freezing temperatures to grow wheat. And in the summer, warmer days would rob Kansas soil of 10 percent of its moisture – drying out valuable farmland.

My point to our colleagues is that this affects all of us. The fate of Arctic ice will have broad economic implications in the Lower 48.

I want to talk for a second about the importance about trade and the economy. I know we do have guests from all over. They've already seen how important the Arctic is for this. In the coming years, economic activity in the Arctic is poised to increase substantially. This will have a dramatic downstream impact on Pacific ports like Seattle and Tacoma.

The economy of my home state and Alaska are already deeply interwoven.

According to a recent study by the McDowell Group, Alaska related jobs in the Puget Sound area increased by 9 percent in the last 10 years. And 3.4 million tons of cargo move between our states every year.

An increase in commerce in the Arctic will certainly provide new economic opportunities to both our states.

It is also important that we assess how the melting ice in the Arctic will have a significant impact on global trade.

The opening of the Northern Passage, for example, would reduce the amount of time it would take to travel between Korea and the Netherlands by 10 days, compared to the current route through the Suez Canal.

A 2009 report from the Arctic Council estimates that the Northern Sea Route would offer an overall cost savings of 35-60 percent for ships traveling from East Asia to Europe.

It would also allow ships to circumvent regional conflicts and the risk of piracy near the African coast or Malaysia.

It is also important that we not lose track of the significant challenges this economic opportunity will present.

Although melting ice sheets will eventually increase traffic there will still be significant ice cover, severe storms, and minimal

maritime and weather data to assist vessels transiting those routes. That is why we need to work together to make strategic investments in Arctic science, tools and infrastructure.

One key step in addressing our nation's Arctic priorities is ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

I know my colleague knows well this issue and all of the challenges we've faced in trying to address this here in the United States Senate. But I just want to point out that Presidents George W. Bush and President Obama, Defense Secretaries and the Department of the State, have all supported this effort. Including many, many people in the private sector-everything from shippers to fishing business to natural resources development and I think it's an important issue we need to try to engage our colleagues on.

So the Arctic is certainly a region of great economic importance to our country and at the same time we must work to confront the climate change issues that are posing a threat to the region. I look forward to hearing from many of the witnesses. And again

madam chair, I really do want to compliment you on your perseverance in making sure that we have this historic Arctic hearing today.

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