

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 17, 2011

Admiral Robert Papp
Commandant CG-00
U.S. Coast Guard
Headquarters
2100 2nd St. SW Stop 7000
Washington, DC 20593-7000

Dear Admiral Papp:

As chair and former chair of the Senate Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Oceans, Fisheries Atmosphere and Coast Guard, we urge the United States Coast Guard (USCG) to postpone decommissioning of the icebreaker *Polar Sea* (WAGB 11) and retain it in caretaker status while the Administration considers options for fulfilling the nation's critical icebreaking missions, including a business case analysis required by the *Coast Guard Reauthorization Act of 2010*.

The Coast Guard is required by 14 U.S.C. § 2 to develop, establish, maintain, and operate icebreaking assets to promote safety in U.S. waters and also in non-U.S. waters pursuant to international agreements. Additionally, in its Fiscal Year 2008 report to Congress the USCG noted America has enduring interests in the Polar Regions including national security, law enforcement, maritime safety, scientific research, economic sustainability, and environmental protection, which requires assets capable of polar operations to protect these interests and maintain a sovereign presence.

The need for icebreaking capability has been highlighted by the Coast Guard on numerous occasions. You testified about the need for icebreaker assets at the July 27, 2011 hearing on the emerging economic interests of the Arctic before the Senate Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Oceans, Fisheries Atmosphere and Coast Guard. The recently released "High Latitude" mission analysis found the statutory requirements of the USCG required a total of six icebreakers, three-heavy and three-medium duty, and an additional four icebreakers to maintain the continuous presence requirements of the Naval Operations Concept.

Despite the undeniable and growing need for icebreaker capability, the Coast Guard plans to decommission one of only two heavy-duty icebreaking cutters in the U.S. fleet, the *Polar Sea*. This leaves the U.S. with only one operational icebreaker, the *Healy* (WAGB 20). A second icebreaker, the *Polar Star* (WAGB 10), is currently being refitted for service after years in caretaker status.

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We believe this lack of icebreaking capacity is unacceptable. While the *Polar Sea* has served beyond its expected service life and recently suffered engine failure, we also understand from Coast Guard and private sector engineers that the hull of the *Polar Sea* is still sound and may be worth hundreds of millions of dollars. We think it is premature to scrap this potentially valuable asset. Rebuilding the vessel based on that hull would be considerably less costly than building a replacement vessel from the keel up.

The *Coast Guard Reauthorization Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-281)* requires the Coast Guard complete a Business Case analysis to determine the most cost effective method to address the Coast Guard's aging fleet needs while maximizing taxpayer dollars. This comparative cost-benefit analysis will determine if the Coast Guard should replace or perform service-life extensions on its two existing heavy-duty icebreaking ships, including the *Polar Sea*. Without the benefit of this required analysis, the Coast Guard should not begin decommissioning a vessel before results from this study become available.

We recognize the nation is facing severe, across-the-board federal budget cuts and icebreakers are expensive assets. It is clearly not prudent to decommission *Polar Sea* at this time. We urge the Coast Guard to utilize FY2011 funding currently slated for the decommissioning expenses to maintain the vessel in caretaker status such as "In Commission - Special" status until completion of the Business Case analysis of Coast Guard icebreaker needs, review of the High Latitude study conclusions, and further Congressional consideration.

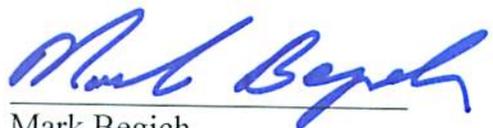
As you noted in your 2011 State of the Coast Guard address, our nation has significant strategic interests in the emerging Arctic. The diminishing ice pack has spurred an increase in Arctic maritime and other activity which means increased Coast Guard responsibilities. Yet we don't have the ability and the resources to operate as effectively as we need to. We agree when you said, "If we are serious about protecting our Arctic national interests and resources, then we must make the investment to do so."

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Mark Begich
United States Senator