

United States Arctic opportunities hearing

Witnesses

Admiral Robert Papp

U.S. Department of State Special Representative for the Arctic

The Honorable Lesil McGuire

Alaska State Legislature Representative

The Honorable Bob Herron

Alaska State Legislature Representative

The Honorable Charlotte Brower

Mayor of North Slope Borough

Dr. Cecilia Bitz

University of Washington College of the Environment, School Atmospheric Sciences Professor

Mr. Patrick R. Arnold

Maine Port Authority Director of Operations and Business Development

Members

Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Chairman

Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Ranking Member

John Barasso (R-WY)

Al Franken (D-MN)

Mazie Hirono (D-HI)

Angus King (I-ME)

Bernie Sanders (I-VT)

On March 5, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources met to evaluate opportunities for the United States to build on its status as an Arctic nation. Senators questioned witnesses from the Alaskan State Legislature, the U.S. Navy, the academic community, and the commercial shipping industry.

Admiral Robert Papp, Special Representative to the Arctic, highlighted the balance between security concerns and climate concerns struck by the U.S.'s proposed program for their Arctic Council chairmanship, which will take place from 2015 to 2017. He explained that the Arctic Council cannot legislate, but he hopes the Council's work will highlight areas of importance for Congress to consider.

Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Angus King (I-ME), and Lisa Murkowski (D-AK) all touched on the importance of icebreakers, ships specifically designed to navigate through and withstand ice-filled waters such as the Arctic Ocean and Antarctic region, to the U.S.'s role in the Arctic. Senator Murkowski pointed out that Russia currently has 29 icebreakers and India is building one while the U.S. has only two. Admiral Papp agreed that icebreakers are necessary for national security. Patrick Arnold, a representative of the shipping industry in Maine, stated that icebreakers are necessary for the U.S. to lead the world in the Arctic, particularly as new Arctic shipping routes open up. Senator Murkowski announced her intent to develop a bill that would require better charting and ice forecasting, as well as create weather stations and buoys for weather and ice tracking. Representative Bob Herron of the Alaska legislature stated the Arctic is not a "snow globe" or part of a museum to be kept static, but needs more development. Another member of the Alaskan legislature, Representative Lesil McGuire, said the Arctic has been dealing with warming for 1,000 years and that she and her constituents are adaptable. Charlotte Brower, Mayor of the North Slope Borough in Alaska, expressed concern over shrinking levels of oil production from the North Slope and the fact that the Alaska pipeline is one-third full. She stated the economic impacts of this are of primary importance to Alaskans.

Dr. Cecilia Bitz testified that the Arctic is one of the fastest warming locations on Earth. She spoke about the need for a sea ice

prediction network to help mitigate impacts on coastal communities as the Arctic is less icebound and more shipping occurs. Senators Al Franken (D-MN) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT) called out the irony of developing resources exposed by climate change that would only increase climate change and its damages.

Senators Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Cantwell, and King spoke on the need to ratify the Law of the Sea treaty, an international agreement originating from the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea which establishes conventions governing the oceans including a process to recognize the extent of territorial waters and national claims to continental shelf area. Becoming a signatory to the treaty would allow the U.S. to define and present its claim of an area of offshore continental shelf in an internationally recognized way.
