

SNOWED IN: UNITED STATES DISINVESTMENT IN THE ARCTIC

(118-73)

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

NOVEMBER 14, 2024

Printed for the use of the
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure



Available online at: [https://www.govinfo.gov/committee/house-transportation?path=/
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U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

58-691 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2025

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Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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NOVEMBER 12, 2024

SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
FROM: Staff, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
RE: Subcommittee Hearing on “*Snowed In: United States Disinvestment in the Arctic*”

I. PURPOSE

The Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will meet on Thursday, November 14, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. ET in 2167 Rayburn House Office Building to receive testimony at a hearing entitled, “*Snowed In: United States Disinvestment in the Arctic*.” The Subcommittee will receive testimony from the United States Coast Guard (Coast Guard or Service) and the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) on the Coast Guard’s icebreaker recapitalization efforts and the ability of the Service to meet its icebreaking and polar region responsibilities.

II. BACKGROUND

THE MISSIONS:

The United States has relied on the Coast Guard’s persistent presence in the polar regions to facilitate American leadership since the United States acquired Alaska in 1867 and took over responsibility for Antarctic icebreaking in 1966.¹ With substantial territorial and economic interests in the Arctic, including one million square miles of territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone, a \$3 billion arctic seafood industry, 90 billion barrels of undiscovered oil reserves, 30 percent of the world’s undiscovered natural gas, \$1 trillion in rare earth minerals, and increased commercial and tourism activity, the importance of the Arctic to the United States cannot be overstated.² Today, the Coast Guard projects United States sovereignty in the Arctic in the face of challenges by Russia and China, and represents American interests in international bodies governing navigation, search and rescue, vessel safety, fisheries enforcement, and pollution response.³ As the Arctic continues to open, and strategic competition in the region attracts more actors, the demand for Coast Guard leadership and presence has only grown. The Service also maintains responsibility for Antarctic icebreaking, a mission it has conducted since 1966. Addi-

¹See UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, ARCTIC STRATEGIC OUTLOOK (Apr. 2019) available at https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/Images/arctic/Arctic_Strategic_Outlook_APR_2019.pdf [hereinafter OUTLOOK].

²*Id.*

³*Id.*

tionally, the Coast Guard is responsible for domestic icebreaking missions in the Great Lakes and other areas subject to freezing conditions.⁴

THE FLEET:

The Coast Guard’s operational ocean-going icebreaking fleet consists of the medium icebreaker HEALY and the heavy icebreaker POLAR STAR.⁵ The heavy icebreaker POLAR SEA is no longer operational and has been used for parts in an effort to keep the POLAR STAR operating over the last few years.⁶ The Coast Guard is also in the process of acquiring a commercially available oceangoing icebreaker, the AIVIQ.⁷ The Service maintains icebreaking capacity on the Great Lakes and in other domestic areas of operation. It seeks to recapitalize these assets in the future with the Great Lakes Icebreakers. In addition, the Service has stated an intention to build a new class of medium icebreakers, the Arctic Security Cutters, to reestablish the presence in the North Atlantic.⁸

Despite the importance of the Coast Guard’s icebreaking missions, the current operational ocean-going icebreaking fleet is limited to two vessels.⁹ Conversely, with significant territory in the Arctic, Russia has a fleet of 55 icebreakers, including 18 military icebreakers.¹⁰ While China cannot claim any territory in the Arctic, it has declared itself a “near Arctic state,” and operates a fleet of two medium and two heavy icebreakers, with more planned for construction later this decade.¹¹ The Coast Guard’s latest fleet mix analysis calls for eight to nine icebreakers to fulfill the Coast Guard’s missions.¹² While the Service is embarking on a substantial recapitalization campaign to replace its aging fleet of icebreakers, as discussed in greater detail below, the recapitalization program is experiencing significant challenges, including design and production delays, substantial cost overruns, and challenges in hiring the necessary workforce. Recognizing the need for greater investment and collaboration, on July 11, 2024, the United States, Canada, and Finland announced the Icebreaker Collaboration Effort (ICE Pact).¹³ Details are still being developed, however, the initial agreement focuses on information sharing, collaboration on workforce development, and an invitation to allies and partners to purchase icebreakers built in American, Canadian, and Finnish shipyards, with the underlying concept being to increase production and reduce overall costs.¹⁴

III. COAST GUARD ICEBREAKING MISSIONS AROUND THE GLOBE

ARCTIC:

In the last decade, the world has witnessed rising access to the Arctic through shipping routes. In 2017, a Russian tanker became the first ship to complete the Northern Sea Route between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans without the aid of icebreakers.¹⁵ By 2021, an astounding 414 ships transited this route.¹⁶ Although the total number of voyages fell in 2022, to only 314 vessels, Russia dominated the activity, as 88 percent of the vessels were Russian-flagged.¹⁷ In 2023, the Coast Guard cutter HEALY successfully transited the Northern Sea Route north of Russian terri-

⁴ Ronald O’Rourke, CONG. RSCH. SERV., RL34391, COAST GUARD POLAR SECURITY CUTTER (POLAR ICEBREAKER) PROGRAM: BACKGROUND AND ISSUES FOR CONGRESS, (Oct. 2, 2024), available at <https://www.crs.gov/reports/pdf/RL34391/RL34391.pdf> [hereinafter CRS PSC Report].

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Abbie Tingstand et. al., *Report on the Arctic Capabilities of the U.S. Armed Forces*, RAND CORPORATION (2023) available at https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1638-1.html.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, COAST GUARD FLEET MIX ANALYSIS FISCAL YEAR 2022 REPORT TO CONGRESS, (on file with Comm.).

¹³ Press Release, THE WHITE HOUSE, Biden-Harris Administration Announces New Polar Partnership “ICE Pact” Alongside Finland and Canada (July 11, 2024), available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/07/11/biden-harris-administration-announces-new-polar-partnership-ice-pact-alongside-finland-and-canada/>.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ Russell Goldman, *Russian Tanker Completes Arctic Passage Without Aid of Icebreakers*, N.Y. TIMES, (Aug. 25, 2017), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/25/world/europe/russia-tanker-christophe-de-margerie.html>.

¹⁶ *Northern Sea Route Sees Lots of Russian Traffic, But No International Transits in 2022*, HIGH NORTH NEWS, (June 20, 2023), available at <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/northern-sea-route-sees-lots-russian-traffic-no-international-transits-2022>. [hereinafter Northern Sea Route]

¹⁷ *Id.*

torial waters.¹⁸ Both Russia and China have declared operations in the Arctic a national priority and made corresponding investments in the capability and capacity to expand their influence.¹⁹ They have also challenged the rules-based order as they jockey for increasing power and dominance.²⁰

As the Nation's primary maritime presence in the polar regions, the United States has increasingly turned to the Coast Guard to secure the Arctic.²¹ To facilitate a myriad of strategic goals, the Coast Guard published an "Arctic Strategic Outlook" in April 2019 and an "Arctic Strategic Outlook Implementation Plan" in October 2023.²² The Strategic Outlook focuses on three lines of effort to achieve the Service's overarching objectives: 1) enhancing the capability to operate effectively in the Arctic; 2) strengthening the rules-based order; and 3) innovating and adapting to promote resilience and prosperity.²³ The Implementation Plan is comprised of 14 interconnected initiatives to execute the lines of effort and identifies the lead organizations or offices responsible for overseeing each initiative, as well as critical action items to advance them.²⁴ Of particular note are the initiatives to expand Arctic surface capabilities, associated support infrastructure, and aviation and communication capabilities.²⁵ It also highlights the need to strengthen internal coordination mechanisms, like the Centers for Arctic Study and Policy and the Polar Coordination Office, as well as international partnerships like strengthening the Arctic Coast Guard Forum and preserving United States leadership in the Arctic Council.²⁶

ANTARCTIC:

Each year, the Coast Guard deploys its only heavy icebreaker to break out the National Science Foundation's McMurdo Station in Antarctica. The POLAR STAR leads *Operation Deep Freeze* breaking through ice up to 21 feet thick to restock the McMurdo Station, and in turn, the South Pole Station, allowing those facilities to continue operations.²⁷ The joint mission includes components from the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Coast Guard to provide support for the Nation's Antarctic research program.²⁸

United States presence in the Antarctic is becoming increasingly critical as other nations are making investments in the region. Last November, the Chinese sent two icebreakers and a cargo ship to the Antarctic to complete construction of China's fifth research station in the region, which marked China's largest deployment to the Antarctic.²⁹

GREAT LAKES AND OTHER DOMESTIC ICEBREAKING MISSIONS:

The Coast Guard maintains and operates domestic icebreaking vessels to promote safety in United States waters and access to navigation and commerce. This includes four main purposes: search and rescue; urgent response to vessels; exigent community service requests; and to facilitate navigation. The Service conducts domestic icebreaking operations in three of its nine districts—the Great Lakes, New England, and the Mid-Atlantic.³⁰ In general, two-thirds of the domestic icebreaking mission occurs on the Great Lakes, where 55 percent of the regional economy is de-

¹⁸ Malte Humpert, *U.S. Coast Guard Icebreaker Sails in Proximity to Russia's Northern Sea Route*, HIGH NORTH NEWS, (Sept. 4, 2023), available at https://www.arctictoday.com/us-coast-guard-icebreaker-sails-in-proximity-to-russias-northern-sea-route/?wallit_nosession=1.

¹⁹ Northern Sea Route *supra* note 14.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ United States Coast Guard, Arctic Strategic Outlook Implementation Plan (Oct. 2023) available at <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Oct/25/2003327838/-1/-1/0/ARCTIC%20STRATEGIC%20OUTLOOK%20IMPLEMENTATION%20PLAN%20508%20COMPLIANT.PDF> [hereinafter IMPLEMENTATION].

²² See OUTLOOK, *supra* note 1; See also IMPLEMENTATION, *supra* note 21.

²³ OUTLOOK, *supra* note 1.

²⁴ IMPLEMENTATION, *supra* note 21.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, *Coast Guard Crew Takes on Deep Freeze* (Jan. 11, 2024), available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/Article/3637624/>.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Biggest Chinese Antarctic fleet sets off to build research station*, REUTERS (Nov. 1, 2023), available at <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/biggest-chinese-antarctic-fleet-sets-off-build-research-station-2023-11-01/>.

³⁰ GAO, GAO-24-106619, *Coast Guard: Improved Reporting on Domestic Icebreaking Performance Could Clarify Resource Needs and Tradeoffs* (Jan. 16, 2024), available at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-106619> [hereinafter Domestic Icebreaking Performance].

pendent on key shipping channels.³¹ On the Great Lakes, the Coast Guard's icebreaking efforts are coordinated with the Canadian Coast Guard.

With three of America's eight major industrial regions located within 100 miles of the Great Lakes, year-round flow of raw materials in the Great Lakes region is vital to American industry and the economy. Additionally, although harsh winter conditions cause commercial shipping activity to reduce significantly, demand for bulk commodities such as coal, road salt, home heating oil, and fuel products ensures that a few bulk carriers, tank vessels, and tug/barge companies remain active throughout the closed navigation season.³²

Currently, the Coast Guard operates a total of nine Great Lakes icebreakers, including one heavy icebreaker, the USCGC *Mackinaw*, six 140-foot *Bay*-class icebreaking tugs, and two 225-foot *Juniper*-class seagoing buoy tenders displacing about 2,000 tons each that have a light icebreaking capability.

NORTH ATLANTIC:

The Coast Guard's icebreaking presence in the North Atlantic dates back to *Operation Nanook* in 1946, where the Coast Guard Icebreaker NORTHWIND supported a mission to establish a radio and weather station in Thule, Greenland.³³ While the Coast Guard no longer engages in icebreaking missions in the North Atlantic, one impetus for the need of a new class of medium icebreakers is to access areas in the region that are too shallow to allow Polar Security Cutter operations. More recently, the Coast Guard participated in joint training exercises with the Canadian Coast Guard in the region, utilizing Fast Response Cutters and Medium Endurance Cutters.³⁴

IV. COAST GUARD LEGACY ICEBREAKERS

POLAR STAR AND POLAR SEA:



Figure 1: USCGC POLAR STAR

As the Nation's only heavy icebreaker, the POLAR STAR annually breaks ice up to 21 feet thick to ensure the resupply of McMurdo Station in Antarctica.³⁵ In the last few years, this has been its only patrol, yet continues to have increasing mission requirements. Commissioned in 1976, the POLAR STAR has far surpassed its regular service life and has been dependent on constant service life extension programs to allow it to function, heavily straining Coast Guard resources.³⁶ Despite this, the vessel is currently undergoing a substantial overhaul to further extend its service-life into the next decade. The POLAR SEA, another heavy icebreaker and the sister ship of the POLAR STAR, is no longer operational, although it is still owned and maintained by the Service. Most recently, it has been used for parts to keep the POLAR STAR operational. This was critical, in January, when the POLAR STAR was disabled just a few miles from McMurdo Station and was unable to break

³¹ *Id.*

³² U.S. Coast Guard Great Lakes Domestic Icebreaking Frame Work, available at <https://homeport.uscg.mil/Lists/Content/Attachments/610/Great%20Lakes%20DOMICE%20Framework.pdf>.

³³ The National Iron & Steel Heritage Museum, *USCGC Northwind*, available at https://steelmuseum.org/icebreakers_exhibit_2021/north_wind.cfm.

³⁴ U.S. Coast Guard Completes Operation Nanook 2021, SEAPOWERMAGAZINE (Aug. 18, 2021) available at <https://seapowermagazine.org/u-s-coast-guard-completes-operation-nanook-2021/>.

³⁵ See UNITED STATES COAST GUARD—PACIFIC AREA, *USCGC Polar Star (WAGB 10)*, available at <https://www.pacificarea.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Cutters/cgcPolarStar/>.

³⁶ UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Acquisitions Directorate, Polar Security Cutter*, available at <https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Assistant-Commandant-for-Acquisitions-CG-9/Programs/Surface-Programs/Polar-Icebreaker/>.

ice or transit due to the failure of cooling systems in its controllable pitch propeller, rendering the shafts inoperable. The needed parts were sourced from POLAR SEA.

HEALY:



Figure 2: USCGC HEALY

HEALY is the Coast Guard's only icebreaker specifically designed for Arctic research and is operated in collaboration with the National Science Foundation, as well as other agencies.³⁷ It deploys annually to the Arctic to support multiple science missions and *Operation Arctic Shield*, the Service's annual operation to execute Coast Guard missions, enhance maritime domain awareness, strengthen partnership, and build preparedness, prevention, and response capabilities across the Arctic domain.³⁸

HEALY is considered a medium endurance icebreaker and was built more than 25 years ago. This summer it suffered a major casualty, which cut its deployment short. Notably, for the duration of this casualty, the United States was left without an operational polar icebreaking-capable vessel since the POLAR STAR was in dry-dock for service life extension repairs. This left a gaping hole in the Nation's capabilities and security. HEALY was able to resume its voyage in October.³⁹

MACKINAW AND OTHER DOMESTIC ICEBREAKING CAPABILITIES:



Figure 3: USCGC MACKINAW

The Coast Guard operates a fleet of 33 vessels capable of domestic icebreaking missions that include a dedicated Great Lakes icebreaker, 20 icebreaking tugs, and 12 buoy tenders capable of light icebreaking.⁴⁰ MACKINAW is the lone Great Lakes heavy icebreaker and is the most capable, able to break ice greater than 32 inches thick.⁴¹

³⁷ *U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Healy, National Science Foundation embark on Arctic Ocean mission*, UNITED STATES COAST GUARD NEWS, (Aug. 26, 2023), available at <https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/3506293/us-coast-guard-cutter-healy-national-science-foundation-embark-on-arctic-ocean/>.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ Email from Coast Guard Legislative Affairs to H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure staff (Oct. 4, 2024 8:08pm) (on file with Comm.).

⁴⁰ Domestic Icebreaking Performance, *supra* note 28.

⁴¹ *Id.*

V. COAST GUARD ICEBREAKER ACQUISITIONS

POLAR SECURITY CUTTER (PSC):

Figure 4: Design Mockup of Polar Security Cutter

The Coast Guard anticipates the need for enhanced Arctic capabilities in the coming years to support United States economic, security, and scientific interests, and carry out Coast Guard missions.⁴² The Service is working to replace and expand its fleet of heavy icebreakers with at least three PSCs.⁴³ Additionally, the Service is considering the acquisition of additional medium icebreakers through the Arctic Security Cutter Program.⁴⁴ In 2019, the Coast Guard and United States Navy, operating through an integrated program office, awarded VT Halter Marine Inc. of Pascagoula, Mississippi, a fixed price incentive contract for the detailed design and construction of the lead PSC.⁴⁵ The yard was subsequently purchased by Bollinger Shipyards, LLC. Construction on the first PSC was planned to begin in 2022 with contract delivery planned for the mid-2020s.⁴⁶ Design delays have plagued the program, and despite repeated requests from the Committee, the Coast Guard is unable to commit to a timeline or cost for the first PSC.⁴⁷ While the Coast Guard is in the process of renegotiating the contract to arrive at a new price and timeline, the first hull is likely to be substantially delayed and have a significantly higher cost than originally estimated.⁴⁸

The Coast Guard faces many hurdles in building the PSC, including building the first heavy icebreaker in the United States in more than 50 years.⁴⁹ Icebreakers have substantial design and construction differences from traditional vessels, including hulls with thicker steel and dense framing structures.⁵⁰ A GAO study found that the program suffers from unreliable schedule and cost estimates, and the complexity of the design has led to substantial schedule delays.⁵¹ To date, the final design is still incomplete.

The Coast Guard has received appropriations for PSC hulls one and two.⁵² However, because of cost increases, it is unlikely the appropriated money intended for the first two PSCs will be sufficient to cover the cost of even one PSC.⁵³ The Coast

⁴² UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Acquisitions Directorate, Polar Security Cutter*, available at <https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Assistant-Commandant-for-Acquisitions-CG-9/Programs/Surface-Programs/Polar-Icebreaker/>.

⁴³ CRS PSC Report, *supra* note 3.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Review of Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request for the Coast Guard: Hearing before the H. Subcomm. on Coast Guard and Maritime Transp. of the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure*, 118th Cong. (Apr. 18, 2023) (response from Admiral Linda Fagan, Commandant of the United States Coast Guard).

⁴⁸ Briefing from United States Coast Guard staff to H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure staff (Jan. 11, 2024).

⁴⁹ GAO, GAO-23-105949, COAST GUARD ACQUISITIONS: POLAR SECURITY CUTTER NEEDS TO STABILIZE DESIGN BEFORE STARTING CONSTRUCTION AND IMPROVE SCHEDULE OVERSIGHT: (2023), available at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-105949>.

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2024, H.R. 7659, 118th Cong. (2024) (noting this legislation was passed out of the House of Representatives on May 14, 2024) [hereinafter CGAA 2024].

⁵³ CRS PSC Report, *supra* note 3.

Guard did not request funding for the PSC program in the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Budget Request but will require substantial additional funding in future years.⁵⁴ The Coast Guard plans to homeport the PSCs in Seattle.

COMMERCIALLY AVAILABLE ICEBREAKER:



Figure 5: AIVIQ

The Coast Guard is in the process of purchasing a commercially available icebreaker with medium icebreaking capability to supplement its oceangoing icebreaking fleet. There is currently only one commercially available icebreaker that meets the requirements, the AIVIQ, which is owned by Edison Chouest.⁵⁵ The Coast Guard was appropriated \$125 million in FY 2024 to purchase the vessel.⁵⁶ The Coast Guard's Unfunded Priorities List for FY 2025 includes a request of \$25 million to missionize the vessel. The Coast Guard has announced that it plans to homeport the ship in Juneau, Alaska.⁵⁷ This will require significant improvements to the infrastructure in Juneau, specifically reinforcement of the pier in preparation for routine use and providing additional housing for the crew.

ARCTIC SECURITY CUTTER:

The Arctic Security Cutter is the Coast Guard's potential program to acquire a fleet of medium icebreakers.⁵⁸ The design, cost, fleet mix analysis, and overall need is still to be determined. Given the challenges associated with the PSC program, there is substantial concern about the Coast Guard embarking on an additional icebreaker acquisition effort. A 2017 National Academies Report questioned the need for a medium icebreaker to fulfill the Coast Guard's statutory missions, and asserted that the most cost-effective solution is likely a single design.⁵⁹ The Coast Guard asserts that the PSC's draft will limit operations for certain missions where a vessel with shallower draft would be better suited to fulfil the mission needs.

GREAT LAKES ICEBREAKER:

The Coast Guard estimates an additional icebreaker, similar in capability to the MACKINAW, will cost \$350 million.⁶⁰ The Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2024 directs the Coast Guard to submit a plan to Congress on the acquisition strategy for an additional Great Lakes Icebreaker.⁶¹

⁵⁴ UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, FY 2025 CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET JUSTIFICATION (2024), available at https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/2024_0322_us_coast_guard.pdf.

⁵⁵ Contract Opportunity, UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, USCG Intent to Sole Source Commercially Available Polar Icebreaker (Updated), (Mar. 1, 2024), available at <https://sam.gov/opp/a12ad39d150d4df0ab6e4773d1cf17d0/view>.

⁵⁶ Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, Pub. L. No. 118-47 (2024).

⁵⁷ See Press Release, UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *U.S. Coast Guard Announces Juneau Homeporting for Future Icebreaker*, (Aug. 14, 2024); See also *U.S. Coast Guard Closes In on Purchase of Icebreaker Aiviq*, MARITIME EXECUTIVE, (Aug. 14, 2024); See also Heather Mongilio, *Coast Guard Names Juneau as Home Port for New Icebreaker*, USNI NEWS, (Aug.) 15, 2024); See also James Brooks, *Coast Guard Confirms Plans to Buy Polar Icebreaker, Station It in Juneau*, ALASKA BEACON, (Aug. 17, 2024).

⁵⁸ CRS PSC Report, *supra* note 3.

⁵⁹ NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCE, *Acquisition and Operation of Polar Icebreakers: Fulfilling the Nation's Needs* (July 11, 2017), available at <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/24834/acquisition-and-operation-of-polar-icebreakers-fulfilling-the-nations-needs>.

⁶⁰ CRS PSC Report, *supra* note 3.

⁶¹ CGAA 2024, *supra* note 52.

VI. WITNESSES

- Vice Admiral Peter W. Gautier, Deputy Commandant for Operations, United States Coast Guard
- Vice Admiral Thomas G. Allan, Jr., Deputy Commandant for Mission Support, United States Coast Guard
- Heather MacLeod, Director, Homeland Security and Justice, United States Government Accountability Office

SNOWED IN: UNITED STATES DISINVESTMENT IN THE ARCTIC

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2024

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME
TRANSPORTATION,
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 11:01 a.m., in room 2167 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Daniel Webster (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. The Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation will come to order.

I ask unanimous consent that the chair be authorized to declare a recess at any time during today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

I ask unanimous consent that the Members not on the subcommittee be permitted to sit with the subcommittee at today's hearing and ask questions.

Without objection, so ordered.

As a reminder, if Members want to insert a document into the record, email us at DocumentsTI@mail.house.gov.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DANIEL WEBSTER OF FLORIDA, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Today, the subcommittee will receive testimony from the Coast Guard's icebreaking recapitalization efforts and the ability of the Service to meet its icebreaking and polar region responsibilities.

I would like to welcome our witnesses today, Vice Admiral Peter Gautier, Deputy Commandant for Operations; Vice Admiral Thomas Allan, Deputy Commandant for Mission Support; and Heather MacLeod, Director of Homeland Security and Justice at the Government Accountability Office. Welcome, all of you.

The United States has relied on the Coast Guard's persistent presence to demonstrate America's sovereignty in the Arctic since the United States acquired Alaska in 1867, and in the Antarctic since the Navy gave up Antarctic icebreaking in 1966.

In the Arctic, the Coast Guard projects America's sovereignty in a region containing substantial resources that support a robust fishing industry, vast energy and mineral resources, and new routes to facilitate maritime commerce. Given these immense re-

sources, it should come as no surprise that adversaries, including Russia and China, are working to assert themselves in the region, with Russia fielding 55 icebreakers and China deploying 4.

At the same time, our Nation has two operational icebreakers, one of which is dedicated to the Service's Antarctic mission in support of the National Science Foundation and is operating well past its intended service life. Not even John Rayfield, who's sitting beside me as the subcommittee staff director, he wasn't even here when the *Polar Star* was commissioned in 1977. That is a long time.

Mr. RAYFIELD. Yes, I didn't miss it by much.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. No, when was it?

Mr. RAYFIELD. I came in 1980.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Okay.

To ensure continued polar icebreaking capability, the Coast Guard embarked on the Polar Security Cutter program that was intended to deliver three new icebreakers beginning this year. That timeline and associated cost estimates were unrealistic, and the Coast Guard has yet to approve a final design for the vessel and is unable to provide Congress with a new timeline or a new cost estimate for the first vessel.

I am optimistic that progress is being made at the shipyard under the new owner and operator, but it is well past time that the Coast Guard provide us a plan to acquire the needed vessels to carry out its polar mission and execute it.

So, Vice Admiral Gautier, nearly 1 year ago, this subcommittee examined the Service's Arctic missions, and during that time, you assured us that the Coast Guard would provide a plan on how the Service will acquire its new fleet of icebreakers. Nearly 1 year has passed since that took place, and we don't have a plan. I expect you and Admiral Allan to clearly articulate how you will acquire these vessels and what resources are required to carry out the Coast Guard's polar mission.

I also note that nearly 2 months ago, the bipartisan full committee and subcommittee leadership wrote Admiral Fagan requesting an update on the progress towards the PSC program milestones which the Coast Guard has stated it would meet by the end of the year. While the Commandant replied to the letter earlier this week, she failed to provide any meaningful answers to the questions. Accordingly, we expect to visit with the Commandant in person after the Thanksgiving holiday to discuss the Coast Guard's continued lack of action.

Outside our polar regions, the Coast Guard provides critical icebreaking capabilities to keep commerce moving safely on our Great Lakes and at the United States Northeast ports. These missions are critical. It is important that the Service have the necessary assets to carry out these missions.

[Mr. Webster of Florida's prepared statement follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Daniel Webster of Florida, Chairman,
Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation**

Today the Subcommittee will receive testimony on the Coast Guard's icebreaker recapitalization efforts and the ability of the Service to meet its icebreaking and

polar region responsibilities. I'd like to welcome our witnesses today—Vice Admiral Peter Gautier, Deputy Commandant for Operations; Vice Admiral Thomas Allan, Deputy Commandant for Mission Support; and Heather MacLeod, Director of Justice and Homeland Security at the Government Accountability Office.

The United States has relied on the Coast Guard's persistent presence to demonstrate American sovereignty in the Arctic since the United States acquired Alaska in 1867, and in the Antarctic since the Navy gave up Antarctic icebreaking in 1966.

In the Arctic, the Coast Guard projects American sovereignty in a region containing substantial resources that support a robust fishing industry, vast energy and mineral reserves, and new routes to facilitate maritime commerce. Given these immense resources, it should come as no surprise that adversaries, including Russia and China, are working to assert themselves in the region, with Russia fielding a fleet of 55 icebreakers and China deploying four.

At the same time, our nation has two operational icebreakers, one of which is dedicated to the Service's Antarctic mission in support of the National Science Foundation and is operating well past its intended service life. Not even John Rayfield, the Subcommittee's staff director, was on the Hill when the POLAR STAR was commissioned in 1977.

To ensure continued polar icebreaker capability, the Coast Guard embarked on the Polar Security Cutter (PSC) program that was intended to deliver three new icebreakers beginning this year. That timeline and the associated cost estimate were unrealistic, and the Coast Guard has yet to approve a final design for the vessel and is unable to provide Congress with a new timeline or a new cost estimate for the first vessel.

I am optimistic about progress being made at the shipyard under its new owner and operator, but it is well past time that the Coast Guard provide us a plan to acquire the needed vessels to carry out its polar missions and execute on it.

Vice Admiral Gautier, nearly a year ago, this subcommittee examined the Service's Arctic missions, and during that time you assured us that the Coast Guard would provide a plan on how the Service will acquire its new fleet of icebreakers. Nearly a year later we still do not have that plan. Today, I expect you and Admiral Allan to clearly articulate how you will acquire these vessels and what resources you require to carry out the Coast Guard's polar missions.

I also note that nearly two months ago, the bipartisan full Committee and Subcommittee leadership wrote to Admiral Fagan requesting an update on the progress towards PSC program milestones which the Coast Guard has stated it will meet by the end of the year. While the Commandant replied to our letter earlier this week, she failed to provide any meaningful answers to our questions. Accordingly, we expect to visit with the Commandant in person after the Thanksgiving holiday to discuss the Coast Guard's continued lack of action.

Outside our polar regions, the Coast Guard provides critical icebreaking capability to keep commerce moving safely on our Great Lakes and at United States Northeast ports. These missions are critical, and it is important the Service have the necessary assets to carry out these missions.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. To our witnesses, thank you for participating today. Thank you for coming. I really appreciate it. I look forward to hearing your testimony.

Now, I recognize the former chairman, now the ranking member of the committee. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICK LARSEN OF WASHINGTON, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, Chair, for calling this hearing on a topic of great importance, our Nation's icebreaking capabilities.

We could have just as easily called this hearing "Iced Out." But whether we're iced out or snowed in, we're stuck when it comes to icebreaking capability.

There's never been a more important time for the United States to maintain and expand its leadership in the Arctic. The region is rich in natural resources, including 90 billion barrels of undis-

covered oil, 30 percent of the world's undiscovered natural gas, and \$1 trillion in rare earth minerals.

Depending on who develops these resources and how, the Arctic can either challenge or accelerate the global transition to clean energy and transportation. In the last decade, we have all seen the rise of Arctic shipping routes. Over 400 ships transited the Northern Sea Route between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans in 2021, a route previously impassable without an icebreaker.

However, this activity has been dominated by Russian-flagged vessels, and both Russia and China have jockeyed for control of the region. In addition, the region hosts a \$3 billion seafood industry, increasing tourism activity, and critical scientific research missions.

So, to do any of this work in the Arctic, the U.S. relies on the Coast Guard and its icebreakers to represent our interest in the region, including leadership roles on international bodies governing navigation, search and rescues, vessel safety, fisheries, and pollution.

Icebreaking vessels are critical for the Coast Guard to effectively traverse the treacherous polar conditions, provide access for other stakeholders, and complete its missions in the Arctic. Our presence equals our sovereignty.

However, decades of underinvestment have left the Coast Guard with only two oceangoing icebreakers, the medium icebreaker *Healy* and the heavy icebreaker *Polar Star*, which has already been extended far past its regular service life.

In conjunction with polar icebreaker missions, the Coast Guard is charged with domestic icebreaking in three of its nine districts. The Coast Guard also needs to expand its domestic icebreaker capability and infrastructure to support that mission.

Plans to homeport the Polar Security Cutters in Seattle necessitate improvements to Base Seattle, as Base Seattle is the gateway for Arctic missions and supports critical maintenance.

So, all of this is in contrast to Russia. Russia operates a fleet of 55 icebreakers, including 18 military icebreakers. China also operates a fleet of two medium and two heavy icebreakers, with more planned for constructions.

These nations have recognized the value of the Arctic and invested heavily in securing dominance in that region. So, make no mistake, the U.S.' growing fleet disadvantage presents an existential threat to our interests, our leadership, and our national security in the Arctic. That is why the Coast Guard is working to replace and expand its fleet of icebreakers, including an effort to acquire three heavy icebreakers through its Polar Security Cutter program.

Originally, construction of the first cutter was scheduled to begin in 2022 with delivery in the mid-20s. Unfortunately, we have reached the mid-20s, and the shipyard that won the contract has been sold, the design is only 60 percent complete, and the Coast Guard has not determined the delivery date or the final cost for the cutters.

It is important to note that acquiring these vessels is no easy task. This is the first domestic construction of a heavy icebreaker in the U.S. in over 50 years, which only underscores the need for

continued investment in U.S. shipyards and shipbuilding capabilities.

Without a robust domestic shipbuilding industry, the Coast Guard will continue to face challenges acquiring any vessel. That is why it is critical that the U.S. recently, in fact, yesterday, signed the ICE Pact, a collaboration between the U.S., Canada, and Finland to share information and technology and increase the supply of icebreakers for our allies. Leveraging these international partnerships is crucial if the U.S. hopes to increase production, reduce cost, and rebuild its domestic shipbuilding industry.

However, despite repeated requests from this committee, the Coast Guard has also not committed to a timeline or cost for construction of the first Polar Security Cutter. So, today's hearing is an opportunity for this committee to receive more information about the Coast Guard's plan to complete construction.

I also look forward to hearing how the Coast Guard intends to improve its Polar Security Cutter program, including addressing the GAO's open recommendations.

Finally, Congress has to recognize the Coast Guard will require additional resources in future years to complete construction and to expand its icebreaker fleet in the Arctic. While the Coast Guard has received appropriations for two vessels, that funding is now unlikely to cover construction for the first Polar Security Cutter.

So, Chairman Webster and Ranking Member Carbajal, thanks for holding this hearing. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

And with that, I yield back.

[Mr. Larsen of Washington's prepared statement follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Rick Larsen of Washington, Ranking Member,
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

Thank you, Chairman Webster, for calling this hearing on a topic of great importance: icebreaking capabilities.

We could have just as easily called this hearing, "Iced Out." Whether we're iced out or snowed in, we're stuck when it comes to icebreaking capability.

There has never been a more important time for the United States to maintain and expand its leadership in the Arctic.

The region is rich in natural resources including 90 billion barrels of undiscovered oil, 30 percent of the world's undiscovered natural gas and \$1 trillion in rare earth minerals.

Depending on which actors develop these resources—and how—the Arctic could either challenge or accelerate the global transition to clean energy and transportation.

In the last decade, we have also seen the rise of Arctic shipping routes. Over 400 ships transited the Northern Sea Route between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans in 2021—a route previously impassible without an icebreaker.

However, this activity has been dominated by Russian-flagged vessels, and both Russia and China have jockeyed for control of the region.

In addition, the region hosts a \$3 billion seafood industry, increasing tourism activity and critical scientific research missions.

To do any of this work, the U.S. relies on the Coast Guard—and its icebreakers—to represent our interests in the region, including leadership roles on international bodies governing navigation, search and rescue, vessel safety, fisheries and pollution.

Icebreaking vessels are critical for the Coast Guard to effectively traverse the treacherous polar conditions, provide access for other stakeholders and complete its missions in the Arctic. Our presence equals our sovereignty.

However, decades of underinvestment have left the Coast Guard with only two ocean-going icebreakers: the medium icebreaker HEALY and the heavy icebreaker POLAR STAR, which has already been extended far past its regular service life.

In conjunction with the Polar icebreaking missions, the Coast Guard is charged with domestic icebreaking in three of its nine districts. The Coast Guard also needs to expand its domestic icebreaking capability and infrastructure to support that domestic mission.

Plans to home port Polar Security Cutters in Seattle, Washington, necessitate improvements to Base Seattle.

Base Seattle is the gateway for our Arctic missions and supports critical maintenance.

All of this is in contrast to Russia who operates a fleet of 55 icebreakers, including 18 military icebreakers. China also operates a fleet of two medium and two heavy icebreakers, with more planned for construction.

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Finally, Congress must recognize that the Coast Guard will require additional resources in future years to complete construction and expand its icebreaking fleet in the Arctic. While the Coast Guard has received appropriations for two vessels, that funding is now unlikely to cover construction for the first Polar Security Cutter.

Chairman Webster and Ranking Member Carbajal, thanks for holding this important hearing. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you, Representative.

So, Mr. Carbajal, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SALUD O. CARBAJAL OF CALIFORNIA, RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Chairman Webster, for calling today's hearing.

The Coast Guard is the premier agency tasked with projecting sovereignty in the Arctic, which is a critically important mission.

The region is slowly opening to all forms of commerce. The Arctic region has a \$3 billion seafood industry, vulnerable to overfishing, and contains billions of dollars in natural resources. A U.S. pres-

ence is required to ensure safe and responsible development and the protection of resources and the environment.

Unfortunately, the Coast Guard icebreaker mission is woefully underresourced. The Service's only two oceangoing icebreakers are well past their service life and often the victims of machinery casualties. This is simply unacceptable.

I've had the privilege of seeing firsthand the capability of our Coast Guard icebreakers, and I understand the important service they provide to our Nation.

While recapitalization of the icebreaking fleet was identified as a priority almost two decades ago, we are still several years and over \$1 billion away from the delivery of the first Polar Security Cutter. As a result, the United States is missing out on the opportunity to enforce rules-based order and freedom of navigation in a geopolitically competitive arena in the Arctic. It's not simply about icebreaking.

On the Great Lakes, the Coast Guard operates nine icebreakers and only one is a heavy icebreaker. For the region itself, which is heavily dependent on commercial shipping, the need for more capable assets cannot be understated. Fifty-five percent of the regional economy is dependent on key shipping channels, and two-thirds of domestic icebreaking operations happen on the Great Lakes.

It is no secret that the United States has fallen behind the curve when it comes to the number of ice capable ships in our arsenal and the time spent in the Arctic. This hearing today is focused on the need for the United States to invest in newer and better ships, more sophisticated technologies, and the capabilities to sustain the invaluable geostrategic presence in the region.

While the Coast Guard has done as much as they can with only two ships, we need to give them the opportunity to do more with more. I have major concern about the delayed PSC program and the amount of funding actually needed to just get one ship built. This is a far cry from the over 55 ships that are at our adversary's disposal. From a national security perspective alone, this, again, is unacceptable.

I want to be clear, the resources required to build, homeport, and maintain Polar Security Cutters are substantial. If Congress does not double the Coast Guard's budget in 2026, the Service will either have to abandon the program, cease construction of Offshore Patrol Cutters, or cut significant portions of its operations.

The House passed an authorization bill earlier this year that begins to appropriately resource the Coast Guard, and I implore my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee to follow suit.

The Service has proven time and time again that even in the face of ship casualties and little to no resource support, they continue to sail onward. But how much can we keep asking of them? It's time for Congress to step up.

I am proud to advocate for America's Coast Guard and advocate for increased resources.

I look forward to the testimony today and to hear about how Congress can better support the Service.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

[Mr. Carbajal's prepared statement follows:]

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**Prepared Statement of Hon. Salud O. Carbajal of California, Ranking
Member, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation**

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I am proud to advocate for America's great Coast Guard and advocate for increased resources. I look forward to the testimony today to hear about how Congress can better support the Service.

I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you very much.

Briefly, I would like to take a moment and explain the lighting system. Green is go. Yellow is slow down. Red is stop. Pretty simple.

I ask unanimous consent that the witnesses' full statements be included in the record.

Without objection, so ordered.

I ask unanimous consent that the record of today's hearing remain open until such time as the witnesses have provided answers to any questions that may be submitted to them in writing.

Without objection, so ordered.

I ask unanimous consent that the record remain open for 15 days for additional comments and information submitted by Members or witnesses to be included in the record of today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

As your written testimony has been made part of the record, the committee asks that you limit your oral remarks to 5 minutes.

With that, Vice Admiral Gautier, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

TESTIMONY OF VICE ADMIRAL PETER W. GAUTIER, DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR OPERATIONS, U.S. COAST GUARD; VICE ADMIRAL THOMAS G. ALLAN, JR., DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR MISSION SUPPORT, U.S. COAST GUARD; AND HEATHER MACLEOD, DIRECTOR, HOMELAND SECURITY AND JUSTICE, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

TESTIMONY OF VICE ADMIRAL PETER W. GAUTIER, DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR OPERATIONS, U.S. COAST GUARD

Admiral GAUTIER. Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Larsen, Ranking Member Carbajal, distinguished members of this subcommittee, good morning, and thank you for the opportunity, especially during this particularly busy time in Congress, to share your Coast Guard's important work to advance maritime safety, security, and stewardship in our Arctic homeland and across the entire Arctic region.

Your Coast Guard is in greater demand today than ever before, and upholding our proud 234-year history of serving the homeland and providing national security beyond our borders, including in the high latitudes, remains a top priority.

Through routine presence, meaningful engagements, and deliberate actions that strengthen maritime governance, the Coast Guard provides a full suite of missions and services to Americans living in the U.S. Arctic and preserves our national interest and promotes a peaceful, stable, prosperous, and cooperative Arctic during a great, great time of regional change.

With our unique combination of authorities as an Armed Force, a law enforcement and regulatory agency, and a humanitarian service, the Coast Guard is an ideal instrument for the Nation to responsibly engage in this unique and challenging maritime environment.

We are operating forward to address the safety and security of our Arctic residents and mariners who make their living there, homeporting new cutters, investing in infrastructure and capabilities, prioritizing our operations in the region, and strengthening our international partnerships.

And I would just like to acknowledge a theme of your opening statements that the Arctic physical, operational, and geostrategic domains are changing rapidly, and that just drives increased demand for Coast Guard services.

Russian and Chinese activities have dramatically increased in the U.S. Arctic. Between July and October, the Coast Guard monitored three Chinese research vessels operating above the U.S. extended continental shelf, as well as a PRC Naval Surface Action

Group and a separate Russian Federation Surface Action Group with our cutters and aircraft.

And what's really notable, for the first time, we witnessed the joint operation between the China Coast Guard and the Russian Border Guard in the Surface Action Group operating high in the Bering Sea, and that is a first. That just tells us that their Arctic cooperation is only expanding.

The Coast Guard tracks these activities, and we continue to meet increasing presence with our presence along the U.S.-Russian maritime boundary line and within the U.S. EEZ. Through Operation Frontier Sentinel, we protect our sovereign interests, and we ensure that behaviors are in keeping with international laws and norms.

As this type of activity increases, our Coast Guard will ensure the international rules-based order is maintained, and the sovereignty of the U.S. is protected.

I personally traveled to Alaska in early October, connecting with Coast Guard operational units and partners throughout the region. Local and indigenous groups are alarmed about Russian and Chinese activities in their backyard, the growing risks to the maritime environment from increased shipping, and the existential threat that they view from climate change.

Coast Guard units in the region perform exceptionally under some of the most austere operating conditions on planet Earth, covering an EEZ greater than the lower 48 combined. However, our units are facing readiness challenges that threaten our ability to continue to meet the growing demand for our services across the Arctic.

We are experiencing historic shortfalls in maintenance funding and a shrinking military industrial base that impacts material readiness of our assets. Our current shortfalls in personnel and material readiness create an imperative for action to adjust our fore-structure and posture and operate differently.

Looking forward, we must continue to evolve how the Coast Guard operates, utilizing more capable assets and, with your support, increased resources to meet the critical demands that continue to grow both in breadth and in consequence and complexity.

Coast Guard presence and leadership in the Arctic has never been more important than it is right now, and our service continues to be the right investment to protect the American people and the homeland.

Thank you for the committee's enduring and strong support for America's Coast Guard, and I look forward to your questions.

[The joint prepared statement of Vice Admirals Gautier and Allan is on page 12.]

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you very much.

Next we have Vice Admiral Allan. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

TESTIMONY OF VICE ADMIRAL THOMAS G. ALLAN, JR., DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR MISSION SUPPORT, U.S. COAST GUARD

Admiral ALLAN. Good morning, Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Larsen, Ranking Member Carbajal, and distinguished members of the subcommittee.

I am pleased to be here to highlight the Coast Guard's continued investment and presence in Alaska, the U.S. Arctic, and the polar regions.

The Coast Guard is working hard to meet growing mission needs in the polar regions. The Service remains a unique instrument of national power, supporting national security and strategic objectives around the globe.

As Deputy Commandant for Mission Support, I am focused on delivering solutions that equip our people with assets, tools, and support to project U.S. presence and mission capability in the high latitudes.

The polar regions are experiencing an ever-increasing rate of change requiring asset systems and infrastructure to enable Coast Guard operations in some of the harshest and most remote environments on the Earth. With the strong support of the subcommittee, the Service is prioritizing significant acquisitions and modernization programs to meet national demands.

I am clear-eyed about the challenges that we face in recapitalizing the Nation's fleet of polar icebreakers. Put simply, polar icebreakers are the foundation of the U.S. operational presence, I say that again—presence—and influence in the polar regions. Our Nation needs these multimission cutters to provide assured year-round access and the resulting security to our national interest in the high latitudes.

The Coast Guard is diligently working with Bollinger Mississippi Shipyard building the Polar Security Cutter, and thanks to enormous efforts from many dedicated people, I am very pleased to report that we are on track to seek approval from the Department to begin production by the end of this calendar year.

The Coast Guard works with the U.S. Navy as part of an integrated program office to design and deliver at least three Polar Security Cutters. This arrangement leverages each Service's experience and expertise in large, complex vessel acquisitions.

The Navy support is critical as the United States seeks to construct its first heavy polar icebreaker in nearly 50 years, at a time when the demand for new maritime assets exceeds national shipbuilding capacity.

We are working with our partners in the maritime industry base to address unique challenges in producing a large complex ship like Polar Security Cutter. In conjunction with the prime contractor, we are nearing the end of a long and complex process to modify the contract and formalize cost and schedule requirements before production activities can begin.

The Polar Security Cutter remains one of the Coast Guard's top priority acquisition priorities and retains the attention and focus of Coast Guard and Department of Homeland Security leadership. As we work to advance the acquisition, we are completing service life

extension activities on *Polar Star* and planning major maintenance to address obsolescence and outdated systems on *Healy*.

Additionally, we are moving quickly to acquire a commercially available polar icebreaker as part of our Arctic bridging strategy. While icebreakers are currently in the spotlight, our acquisition portfolio also includes the construction of National Security Cutters, Offshore Patrol Cutters, and Fast Response Cutters that already or will operate in Alaskan waters, as well as delivery of upgraded C-130 long-range surveillance aircraft and MH-60 Tango helicopters that are well suited for the distances and challenges that operators face in that region.

These efforts complement significant investments and shore infrastructure to support the Service's full range of missions, including construction of home port facilities for the Polar Security Cutters in Seattle and a new home port in Juneau for the support of the future operations of the commercially available polar icebreaker.

All of these investments are critical to ensuring Coast Guard presence to safeguard America's interest as an Arctic nation, as well as protection of the people, traditions, and resources of Alaska.

I appreciate the subcommittee's continued bipartisan support, and I look forward to our continued work together on advancing these critical efforts in the high latitudes.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[The joint prepared statement of Vice Admirals Gautier and Allan follows:]

Joint Prepared Statement of Vice Admiral Peter W. Gautier, Deputy Commandant for Operations, U.S. Coast Guard, and Vice Admiral Thomas G. Allan, Jr., Deputy Commandant for Mission Support, U.S. Coast Guard

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chair Webster, Ranking Member Carbajal, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. It is our pleasure to be here today to discuss the Coast Guard's Arctic investments and operations, and their benefits to our national interests. The United States is an Arctic nation, and the Coast Guard has been a key leader and interagency and international partner in advancing maritime safety, security, and stewardship in our Arctic homeland and across the entire Arctic region for over 150 years. Through routine presence, meaningful engagements, and deliberate actions that strengthen maritime governance, the Coast Guard provides a full suite of missions and services to Americans living in the U.S. Arctic and promotes a peaceful, stable, prosperous, and cooperative Arctic during a time of great regional change.

The Arctic is undergoing a dramatic transformation across the physical, operational, and geostrategic domains. We are witnessing firsthand the increasing impacts of climate change and how it is enabling new access to Arctic waters. Arctic activity is increasing and evolving at a rapid pace, from migrating fish stocks and changing fishing patterns to growth in types and locations of vessel transits, including an expansion of tourism. Greater storm impacts and thawing permafrost affect maritime communities across the U.S. Arctic. Accelerated changes in the Arctic environment make Arctic waters more accessible, creating both opportunities and challenges.

At the same time, the Arctic is a region of increasing geostrategic activity, amongst partners and competitors alike. In and near the U.S. Arctic, the Coast Guard is observing increased presence by the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia, which are engaged in unilateral and combined military and coast guard activities, as well as increased research vessel presence. Internationally, the Coast Guard and Arctic partners are increasing activities and engagements that support our common goals.

The Coast Guard has the right combination of authorities, mission expertise, and partnerships to address U.S. Arctic equities head on. However, the Service needs significant investment to modernize and grow our capabilities to keep pace with rapidly evolving challenges and to advance our Nation's interests in the Arctic, and we appreciate the trust and support of Congress and the American people. The Service will continue to prioritize actions that safeguard U.S. interests and serve Americans while promoting safe, secure, and environmentally responsible maritime activity in the Arctic.

ARCTIC STRATEGIES AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES

The Coast Guard is guided in our actions and investments through a set of national, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and Coast Guard strategies. The National Security Strategy (NSS) emphasizes constraining Russia and outcompeting the PRC, and the National Strategy for the Arctic Region (NSAR) emphasizes national defense and homeland security and states that our highest priority is to protect the American people and our sovereign territory. In 2022, the Administration released the Implementation Plan for the NSAR, which serves as a blueprint for the Nation's investments to achieve these national priorities. In addition, in July 2024, the Department of Defense (DoD) published the 2024 Arctic Strategy, which outlines DoD's plan to enhance its Arctic capabilities, deepen engagements with allies and partners, and exercise calibrated presence in the Arctic. The Coast Guard contributed to the development of both the NSS and NSAR and its Implementation Plan, and we will continue to be at the forefront of Arctic strategic leadership.

In October 2023, the Coast Guard published its Arctic Strategic Outlook Implementation Plan to fulfill our obligations across national strategies. This plan underscores the Coast Guard's commitment to promoting safety, sovereignty, and stewardship in the region by describing actions the Service will take over the next decade, given the requisite support and investment. In addition to expanding the Coast Guard icebreaker fleet, the plan aspires to develop additional capabilities and capacity, increase Arctic domain awareness and communication capabilities, strengthen the Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF) and Arctic Council leadership, and modernize the U.S. Arctic Marine Transportation System (MTS). These actions are necessary to meet national strategic objectives and to advance the Arctic priorities of DHS, for which the Coast Guard has a leading role.

STRATEGY TO ACTION

A peaceful, stable, and prosperous Arctic region that is increasingly open to human activity requires sound rules-based governance and responsible behavior in accordance with international norms. As the NSAR states, we continue to "expand U.S. engagement and leadership, pursue new partnerships and arrangements that advance shared interests, and prepare for increased and evolving activity in these regions." With our unique combination of authorities—as an armed force, a law enforcement agency, a regulatory agency, and a humanitarian service—the Coast Guard is an ideal instrument for the Nation to responsibly engage in this unique maritime environment. However, given the vast and unforgiving reaches of the Arctic region, the Coast Guard needs more capable modern assets and resources.

We continue to strengthen maritime safety, security, and stewardship in Alaska and the U.S. Arctic through Operation Arctic Shield, providing persistent cutter presence, rotary wing aircraft positioned seasonally, and sustained personnel engagements for search and rescue, law enforcement, and security missions. As maritime traffic through the Bering Strait and Northern Sea route increases because of receding sea ice and Russia's changing economic factors, the Coast Guard tracks vessel movements and continues to engage in spill response preparedness with partners. Additionally, through partnerships with Alaska communities and federal partners, the Coast Guard will continue to build resilience to the impacts of climate change to conserve critical Arctic maritime ecosystems.

The geopolitics in the Arctic continue to evolve as state and non-state actors seek to advance their interests in the region. As allies, partners, and competitors increasingly contend for diplomatic, economic, and strategic advantage and influence across the globe, these trends also manifest in the Arctic region. Russia and the PRC exemplify this competition—both declared the Arctic a strategic priority; both made significant investments in new or refurbished capabilities; and both are attempting to exert direct and indirect influence across the region.

Russian, PRC, and joint Russian-PRC activities are dramatically increasing in the U.S. Arctic. The Coast Guard tracks these activities, and we continue to "meet increasing presence with presence" along the U.S.-Russian maritime boundary line and within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) through Operation *Frontier*

Sentinel, both to ensure our sovereign rights and assure behavior is in keeping with international norms. Between July and October 2024, the Coast Guard monitored three Chinese research vessels operating in the area above the U.S. extended continental shelf. The Service also monitored a PRC Naval Surface Action Group (SAG) and a separate Russian Federation Navy SAG with our cutters and aircraft. Additionally, this year, for the first time, we observed a joint Russian Border Guard and Chinese Coast Guard exercise in the Arctic, an indication that their Arctic cooperation is expanding. As this type of activity continues to increase, the Coast Guard remains committed to meeting presence with presence to ensure that Russian and PRC vessels operate in accordance with international law in a region important to the United States.

This summer, CGC *Healy* conducted underway operations to enhance presence in the U.S. EEZ in the Arctic, support the National Science Foundation's research into global climate change impacts, and further enhance the safety of the Arctic MTS. These operations were conducted in addition to Coast Guard fisheries enforcement, search and rescue cases, and other extensive marine safety-oriented regulatory activities in Alaskan villages. For each village engagement, Coast Guard members integrate with the local communities and governments to enhance relationships, build partnerships, and provide training in areas such as boating safety and ice rescue.

To reinforce our role as a trusted and reliable partner, the Coast Guard actively participates in bilateral and multilateral Arctic exercises and at-sea engagements with Canadian and European partners. These are critical for advancing multilateral capabilities, integrating with multinational defense allies, and exchanging best practices during fleet integration training. Collectively, they improve our capacity to respond to maritime threats and advance Coast Guard and broader U.S. government interests with key Arctic partners.

The Coast Guard remains a principal member of the ACGF, the North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum, and the North Pacific Coast Guard Forum, and supports U.S. efforts in the Arctic Council. The ACGF is a bridge between diplomacy and operations, serving as an independent, complementary body to the Arctic Council with an operational focus on safe and environmentally responsible maritime activity. The Coast Guard conducts exercises with partner Arctic states through the ACGF to enhance interoperability and provide a platform for direct dialogue among Arctic agencies fulfilling coast guard-like functions. The ACGF is planning its first live exercise since a pause due to COVID and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The exercise will occur in April 2025, ahead of Norway's scheduled transfer of the Arctic Council and ACGF chairmanship to Denmark.

The Arctic Council is the principal multilateral forum for Arctic governance. The Coast Guard provides expertise and leadership in Arctic Council working groups, particularly those related to environmental protection and search-and-rescue. These investments position the United States to model responsible governance and sustainable development across the region.

INVESTING IN ARCTIC CAPABILITIES

These broad operations and wide-ranging activities are executed in one of the globe's most expansive, remote, and unforgiving maritime environments. We are the only federal agency responsible for assuring surface vessel access to polar regions. Our vast responsibility supports myriad national security and strategic objectives and requires commensurate investment. To maintain operational readiness while we recapitalize and build the capacity and capability necessary to meet increasing Arctic challenges, the Coast Guard requires predictable, consistent, and expanded investment. To keep pace with the ever-increasing rate of change, we must provide our workforce with modern assets, systems, and infrastructure to support mission execution. In line with this direction, and with strong congressional support, the Service continues to invest in a multibillion-dollar portfolio of acquisition programs established to deliver capabilities to meet these national demands.

With strong support from Congress, the Coast Guard is investing in Arctic capabilities to meet these challenges. We are building Polar Security Cutters (PSC), Offshore Patrol Cutters (OPC), Fast Response Cutters (FRC), aircraft, and vital shore infrastructure required to meet America's operational needs. Over the past five years, Congress appropriated more than \$500 million that directly invests in Alaska's shore infrastructure, \$1.1 billion for the two OPCs that will be homeported in Kodiak, over \$250 million for four FRCs homeported throughout Alaska, and \$125 million for a Commercially Available Polar Icebreaker that will be homeported in Juneau. Alaskans are already benefiting from earlier funding that included \$625 million for the five C-130s and nearly \$200 million for the six MH-60T helicopters that are already operating out of Air Station Kodiak. Other investments include

more than \$800 million for the PSC, \$60 million to sustain CGC *Polar Star*, and \$350 million for the PSC's homeport in Seattle, Washington, that will advance Coast Guard mission execution in the Arctic.

All told, these amount to just over \$3.3 billion in investments over the past five years. The combined \$3.3 billion represents more than one-third of the \$9.6 billion the Service has received in Procurement, Construction, and Improvement (PC&I) appropriations over the same five-year timeframe.

Highlighting the importance of the investments in polar icebreakers, the United States, Canada, and Finland earlier this year announced their intent to create the Icebreaker Collaboration Effort (ICE) Pact. This proposed trilateral arrangement is intended to strengthen the shipbuilding industry and industrial capacity of each nation and build closer security and economic ties among our countries through information exchange and mutual workforce-development focused on building polar icebreakers. The Coast Guard is supporting DHS and the Department of State's effort to craft the framework of this agreement and looks forward to working with our trilateral partners to advance our Nation's icebreaking capacity through collaboration.

POLAR ICEBREAKING

Heavy polar icebreakers are the foundation of U.S. operational presence and influence in the polar regions. These multi-mission cutters provide assured, year-round access not only for Coast Guard missions, but also in support of critical activities that protect key U.S. interests in the high latitudes. The Coast Guard faces gaps in capability that challenge our ability to operate reliably and meet mission needs. For instance, achieving persistent presence in the Arctic and seasonal Antarctic presence requires a fleet mix of eight to nine icebreakers—including both heavy and medium types. Today we rely on an aging and limited ice-breaking fleet.

With the strong support of this Subcommittee, we are moving forward with the acquisition of the Nation's first new heavy polar icebreakers in nearly five decades. When fully operational, PSCs will provide the global reach and icebreaking capability necessary to project U.S. presence and influence, conduct Coast Guard missions in the high latitudes, and advance our national interests.

Through an Integrated Program Office (IPO), the Coast Guard and Navy are leveraging each Services' experience and expertise in large, complex vessel acquisition programs. The Coast Guard and Navy remain committed to attaining the necessary design maturity prior to beginning production activities. Detail design activities are very nearly complete, and long lead-time material for the lead ship has been delivered to the shipyard. The IPO has adopted an innovative and incremental approach to support early production, Prototype Fabrication Assessment (PFA), which is based on Navy best practices. By prioritizing and starting production on up to eight low-risk modules, PFA allows the shipbuilder to progressively build workforce capability, test new processes and equipment, and reduce production risk. Six modules are currently under construction. These modules have achieved near 100 percent design maturity and present very low risk of re-work. All of these efforts combined are aimed to begin PSC production as soon as possible.

Earlier this year, the Coast Guard notified Congress that the PSC program would exceed cost and schedule thresholds. The program has been working closely with Bollinger Shipyards, who acquired the shipyard from VT Halter Marine in 2022, and is nearing the end of the long and complex process of reviewing their proposal and, following Bollinger's acquisition of the shipyard from VT Halter Marine, negotiating the contract modifications necessary to formally establish new cost and schedule parameters in the updated acquisition program baseline. This work is occurring in parallel with ongoing program activities to support delivery of the PSC fleet as quickly as possible.

To maintain heavy polar icebreaking capability until the PSC class is delivered, the Coast Guard will complete an innovative and successful service life extension on Coast Guard Cutter *Polar Star*, the Nation's only operational heavy polar icebreaker, in 2025. The cutter recently completed the fourth of five planned annual work periods which will enable continued operation of the aging cutter.

Likewise, the Service has initiated a service life extension program for Coast Guard Cutter *Healy*, the Service's only operational medium polar icebreaker, which was commissioned in 1999. The five-year phased production builds upon the lessons learned from *Polar Star*'s service life extension and is planned to be completed between 2026 and 2030. This effort will recapitalize a number of major systems while addressing significant operational degraders to maintain the Coast Guard's required medium icebreaking capability.

In addition to the ongoing maintenance and service life-extending work in the Service's current fleet and with the Subcommittee's support, the Coast Guard re-

ceived funding in Fiscal Year 2024 to procure a commercially available polar icebreaker. The purchase of a commercially available polar icebreaker is an effective strategy to increase operational surface presence in the near-term and add long-term national capacity in the Arctic. Under the authority granted by the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2022, as augmented by the temporary correction in the current short-term continuing resolution, the Coast Guard intends to acquire the motor vessel *Aiviq*, which is the only available U.S.-built icebreaker that meets the Service's requirements.

The negotiations to purchase *Aiviq* are underway, and the Coast Guard's initial activities will be directed at achieving initial operational capability for deployment to District 17 in the spring of 2026. A series of phased modifications will occur between annual Arctic operations to achieve full operational capability. We look forward to adding this important medium icebreaker to our fleet furthering our ability to meet increasing demands in the Arctic.

CONCLUSION

The physical, operational, and geopolitical environment in the Arctic continues to change rapidly, driving demand for U.S. investments, to include Coast Guard presence, influence, and services. The Coast Guard has shaped national security in the Arctic for over 150 years and is central to a U.S. whole-of-government approach to securing national interests in the Polar Regions.

Continued support for a modernized and capable polar fleet and increased Coast Guard Arctic capacity and capabilities will fortify the Nation's position in the increasingly critical Arctic domain. Coast Guard leadership is essential in maintaining a coalition of like-minded partners to shape the Arctic domain as a peaceful, stable, prosperous, and cooperative region. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for your actions to support the members of the Coast Guard.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you.
Ms. MacLeod, you are recognized.

TESTIMONY OF HEATHER MACLEOD, DIRECTOR, HOMELAND SECURITY AND JUSTICE, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Ms. MACLEOD. Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Larsen, Ranking Member Carbajal, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss GAO's recent work on Arctic operations.

As an Arctic nation, the United States has substantial interest in the region. Warming temperatures and melting sea ice have opened new shipping routes, and U.S. adversaries have taken note. This includes growing interest by Russia and China as they seek greater access to the region and its resources.

This has become even more evident as the United States has monitored Chinese and Russian military vessels conducting joint exercises off of Alaska.

My testimony today will focus on two main areas: Coast Guard efforts to assess Arctic risk and challenges the Service faces in carrying out its missions in the region.

As you know, Coast Guard plays a key role in United States Arctic policy. Our work found that the Coast Guard has done a good job of assessing evolving risks in the region, such as those resulting from increased vessel traffic. These may include greater chances of incidents like oilspills or ships in distress.

The Coast Guard has also taken steps to manage risk by deploying cutters and aircraft to the region during times of peak maritime activity, but the Coast Guard has not fully tracked the time and resources spent on its Arctic activities. Complete information on the assets used and the missions conducted in the region would

help the Coast Guard better monitor use of its resources and enable it to make more accurate assessments of future needs.

In prior hearings, we have discussed Coast Guard recruitment and retention challenges that affect the Service's ability to carry out its missions, and workforce shortages continue to be an issue. Our work has found that the Coast Guard asset and infrastructure challenges can negatively impact retention. These issues are particularly acute in the Arctic.

Related to assets, reliance on an aging cutter fleet and the need for additional capacity has hindered the Service's activity in the Arctic. The availability of the Coast Guard's two aging icebreakers is also limited given the substantial maintenance required to keep them operational.

As discussed, to address this gap and maintain reliable Arctic operations, the Coast Guard is procuring three new heavy polar icebreakers known as Polar Security Cutters. However, as GAO has previously reported, this program has experienced design challenges that have caused significant delays.

In addition to its asset challenges, limited infrastructure further hinders Coast Guard's ability to conduct missions in the Arctic. For example, the Coast Guard operates its forward deployed helicopters from a leased aircraft hangar in Alaska because it lacks its own infrastructure.

In 2019, GAO reported that almost half of the Coast Guard's shore infrastructure was beyond its service life, resulting in costly project backlogs. At that time, the backlogs totaled at least \$2.6 billion. Our updated preliminary analysis shows that this total is likely now close to \$7 billion. This is particularly concerning in the Arctic because there is limited infrastructure to begin with.

Further, given competing demands of managing the growing backlog while replacing its aging assets, the Coast Guard will likely face challenges carrying out its Arctic missions, including assisting efforts to counter Russia and China's activities in the region.

In closing, the Coast Guard has a critical role in protecting U.S. interests in the Arctic. It faces growing responsibilities to manage risk to maritime security and national security. Conditions in the region continue to change.

GAO has made recommendations that could help the Coast Guard improve its planning, acquisition, and data collection efforts. Implementing our recommendations will help the Coast Guard to better manage its Arctic-related resource needs and ensure the Service is able to meet its growing responsibilities in the region.

Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Carbajal, and members of this subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.

[Ms. MacLeod's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Heather MacLeod, Director, Homeland Security and Justice, U.S. Government Accountability Office

COAST GUARD: ARCTIC RISKS ASSESSED, BUT INFORMATION GAPS AND NUMEROUS CHALLENGES THREATEN OPERATIONS

Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Carbajal, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work on the U.S. Coast Guard's risks and challenges in the Arctic.¹ As an Arctic nation, the United States has substantial security and economic interests in the region. Current geopolitical trends indicate that it is growing more important to the United States, its allies, and strategic adversaries.² In recent years, there has been an escalation of competition among the United States, Russia, and China in the region. The effects of climate change, technological advancements, and economic opportunities have also driven increased interest and activity in the region, which has increased maritime activity and risks.

Since the Arctic is largely a maritime domain, the U.S. Coast Guard, a multi-mission military service within the Department of Homeland Security plays a key role in Arctic policy implementation and enforcement. As more navigable ocean water has emerged and human activity increases in the region, the Coast Guard faces growing responsibilities to assess and manage risks there, including those posed to maritime security, safety, and the environment. These include, among others, (1) security risks from increased militarization of the Arctic region and potential conflict with Russia or China; (2) safety risks from more frequent and intense winter storms and greater shipping traffic; and (3) environmental risks, such as coastal erosion and oil spills.

My statement today addresses (1) the Coast Guard's actions to assess and mitigate risks in the Arctic region, and (2) key challenges the Coast Guard faces that may affect its Arctic operations and its ability to meet its strategic commitments.

This statement is based primarily on our 2024 report examining the Coast Guard's efforts to plan for and mitigate its Arctic operational risks and our 2023 report on Coast Guard acquisitions that could affect its Arctic operations.³ This statement also includes data on the Coast Guard's shore infrastructure backlog that we previously reported on in 2019, as well as updated data from 2024.⁴ For the reports cited in this statement, we analyzed Coast Guard and Department of Defense documentation and data, and interviewed officials from these agencies, among other methodologies. More detailed information on our scope and methodology can be found in the reports cited in this statement.

Since 2016, we have made 38 recommendations to the Coast Guard and the Department of Homeland Security in reports related to Coast Guard Arctic operations, acquisition, and shore infrastructure issues.⁵ As of November 2024, 15 of 38 rec-

¹ In general, the Arctic is the polar region located at the northernmost part of the Earth. Arctic stakeholders define the Arctic geographical area in different ways. For example, the Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984 defined the Arctic as all United States and foreign territory north of the Arctic Circle and all United States territory north and west of the boundary formed by the Porcupine, Yukon, and Kuskokwim Rivers (in Alaska); all contiguous seas, including the Arctic Ocean and the Beaufort, Bering, and Chukchi Seas; and the Aleutian chain. Pub. L. No. 98-373, tit. I, § 112, 98 Stat. 1242, 1248 (codified at 15 U.S.C. § 4111). The Arctic Circle is the line of latitude located at 66° 33' 44" north of the equator. Other definitions of the Arctic use markers such as the southernmost extent of winter sea ice for oceanic boundaries or the northernmost tree line for terrestrial boundaries.

² GAO, *Arctic Region: Factors That Facilitate and Hinder the Advancement of U.S. Priorities*, GAO-23-106002 (Washington, D.C.: September 6, 2023).

³ See GAO, *Coast Guard: Complete Performance and Operational Data Would Better Clarify Arctic Resource Needs*, GAO-24-106491 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 13, 2024); GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisitions: Polar Security Cutter Needs to Stabilize Design Before Starting Construction and Improve Schedule Oversight*, GAO-23-105949 (Washington, D.C.: July 27, 2023).

⁴ The Coast Guard uses a variety of shore infrastructure assets, such as piers, maintenance buildings, and warehouses, to support its missions. We previously reported on the Coast Guard's backlog of construction and improvement projects within its shore infrastructure portfolio. See GAO, *Coast Guard Shore Infrastructure: Applying Leading Practices Could Help Better Manage Project Backlogs of at Least \$2.6 Billion*, GAO-19-82 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 21, 2019).

⁵ See GAO-24-106491; GAO, *Coast Guard: Improved Reporting on Domestic Icebreaking Performance Could Clarify Resource Needs and Tradeoffs*, GAO-24-106619 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 16, 2024); GAO-23-105949; GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisitions: Offshore Patrol Cutter Program Needs to Mature Technology and Design*, GAO-23-105805 (Washington, D.C.: June 20, 2023); GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisitions: Opportunities Exist to Reduce Risk for the Offshore Patrol Cutter Program*, GAO-21-9 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 28, 2020); GAO-19-82; GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisitions: Polar Icebreaker Program Needs to Address Risks before Committing Resources*, GAO-

ommendations have been implemented and 19 remain open.⁶ We will continue to monitor the Coast Guard's progress in implementing them.

We conducted the work on which this statement is based in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

THE COAST GUARD HAS ASSESSED AND TAKEN STEPS TO MITIGATE ARCTIC RISKS BUT LACKS COMPLETE INFORMATION TO INFORM ITS EFFORTS

The Coast Guard Has Identified and Assessed Arctic Risks and Collaborates with Federal and Regional Partners to Mitigate Them

The Coast Guard has identified and assessed risks—such as those posed by climate change and increased maritime activity—that affect its ability to carry out its missions in the Arctic region and incorporated this information in various planning documents. These documents include the Coast Guard's 2019 *Arctic Strategic Outlook* (Coast Guard Arctic strategy), its 2023 *Arctic Strategic Outlook Implementation Plan* (Coast Guard Arctic implementation plan), and other region-specific documents that identify risks specific to their areas of operation.⁷ For example, the Coast Guard Arctic strategy notes that Russia seeks to consolidate sovereign claims and control access to the region while China aims to gain access to Arctic resources and sea routes to secure and bolster its military, economic, and scientific rise.

The Coast Guard and Department of Defense collaborate to mitigate risks in the Arctic in several ways, including sharing relevant information and expertise and providing operational assistance. Officials from both agencies told us they collaborated on the development of their respective Arctic strategies, work with one another to maintain Arctic maritime domain awareness, and participate in joint exercises in the region.⁸ For example, the Coast Guard provides standby search and rescue support for Operation Arctic Edge, the Department of Defense's joint biennial exercise with the Canadian Armed Forces.

The Coast Guard's collaboration to develop region-specific documents has generated maritime security plans and contingency plans for its field units that identify various risks specific to their operations in the Arctic region and elsewhere, among other efforts.⁹ To develop these plans, the Coast Guard collaborates through various committees, which may include maritime industry stakeholders; federal, state, territorial or Tribal governments; and others, to identify security and marine environmental risks.

The Coast Guard's Arctic Implementation Plan Lacks Key Performance Information

The Coast Guard Arctic implementation plan outlines initiatives and actions that it intends to take to achieve the strategic objectives identified in the Coast Guard Arctic strategy. However, we found in August 2024 that the plan generally does not

18-600 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 4, 2018); GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisitions: Actions Needed to Address Longstanding Portfolio Management Challenges*, GAO-18-454 (Washington, D.C.: July 24, 2018); GAO, *Coast Guard: Status of Polar Icebreaking Fleet Capability and Recapitalization Plan*, GAO-17-698R (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 25, 2017); GAO, *Coast Guard: Arctic Strategy Is Underway, but Agency Could Better Assess How Its Actions Mitigate Known Arctic Capability Gaps*, GAO-16-453 (Washington, D.C.: June 15, 2016); and GAO, *National Security Cutter: Enhanced Oversight Needed to Ensure Problems Discovered during Testing and Operations Are Addressed*, GAO-16-148 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 12, 2016).

⁶We closed four recommendations related to the Coast Guard's acquisition efforts for cutter assets. They were overcome by events and thus were no longer valid.

⁷U.S. Coast Guard, *United States Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook* (Washington, D.C.: April 2019) and *United States Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook Implementation Plan* (Washington, D.C.: October 2023).

⁸According to the Coast Guard, maritime domain awareness is the effective understanding of anything associated with the global maritime domain that could affect the United States' security, safety, economy, or environment. Per the *National Strategy for the Arctic Region* and its accompanying implementation plan, the Department of Defense is to lead efforts to modernize systems that detect and track potential airborne and maritime threats, and the Coast Guard is to support the department's efforts. The Coast Guard is to provide effective maritime security, law enforcement, search and rescue, and emergency response, and expand its icebreaker fleet to support increased presence in the Arctic. The Department of Defense is to support these efforts.

⁹These plans include, for example, Area Maritime Security Plans, which identify critical port infrastructure, operations, and security risks, and determine mitigation strategies and implementation methods, and Area Contingency Plans, which identify plans for oil and hazardous substance spill response, incident management, and all-hazards preparedness.

include key metrics such as performance measures, targets, or time frames for action items.¹⁰ This may make it difficult for the Coast Guard to plan activities, determine resource needs, assess its progress toward strategic objectives, and ensure its efforts are aligned with national efforts. As a result, we recommended that the Coast Guard include performance measures with associated targets and time frames in its implementation plan. The Coast Guard concurred with our recommendation, and we continue to monitor its progress.

The Coast Guard Has Taken Steps to Mitigate Arctic Operational Challenges, but Lacks Key Planning Data

The Coast Guard has taken steps to mitigate the effects on its missions resulting from its limited available assets. For example, the Coast Guard forward deploys cutters and helicopters into the U.S. Arctic region seasonally to reduce transit and response times, which helps to mitigate the effects of having limited assets available for Arctic missions. Similarly, the Coast Guard annually deploys its medium polar icebreaker, the *Healy*, to the Arctic region in support of national objectives and research efforts for several federal agencies. This deployment provides additional seasonal presence in the region that helps to mitigate operational risks. However, the *Healy*'s ability to carry out its annual planned deployments has been limited in recent years in part due to fires onboard the ship in 2020 and 2024.

In August 2024, we reported that key Coast Guard mission performance information was incomplete or missing, such as the number of days that cutters were deployed and the time they spent on various missions in the region.¹¹ Specifically, from fiscal years 2016 through 2023, Coast Guard operational performance reports were either partially complete, incomplete, or unavailable, for reasons such as losses during data migrations and shortages of qualified personnel, according to Coast Guard officials.¹² These performance reports noted that data system limitations may also have affected the accuracy of resource hour use and mission performance data.

The Coast Guard's performance reports are a key input in its operational planning process because they enable the service to quantitatively assess its mission performance, identify capability gaps, and forecast future operational requirements. Accordingly, in August 2024 we recommended that the Coast Guard collect and report complete information about resource use and mission performance in accordance with its guidance. This would better position the service to monitor its activity and make more informed operational planning decisions for the Arctic region. The Coast Guard concurred with our recommendation, and we continue to monitor its progress.

THE COAST GUARD FACES ASSET AND INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES THAT MAY AFFECT ITS ABILITY TO CARRY OUT ARCTIC OPERATIONS AND MEET STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

The Coast Guard has multiple strategic commitments for operations in the U.S. Arctic region but has been unable to meet all of them in recent years for various reasons.¹³ According to the Coast Guard, these include asset availability challenges, such as a lack of reserve major cutters, and competing demands for major cutters in other areas such as the Indo-Pacific region, among other factors.¹⁴ Further, limited infrastructure and logistics capabilities in Alaska amplify asset availability challenges. Efforts to address these challenges in the long term via major acquisitions, such as the Polar Security Cutter program, continue to face significant delays.

¹⁰ GAO-24-106491.

¹¹ GAO-24-106491.

¹² When we evaluated the reports, "complete" meant that elements of the performance reports contained complete resource hour or mission performance data for all missions executed in Coast Guard field units. "Partially complete" meant that elements of the performance reports contained data for some missions but not others. "Incomplete" meant that elements of the performance reports lacked data for all missions. "Unavailable" meant that we could not evaluate performance reports because the Coast Guard could not provide those reports.

¹³ For example, the Coast Guard has maintained a strategic commitment to have a 365-day major cutter presence in U.S. Arctic waters, specifically the Bering Sea. However, it has not always been able to meet this commitment recently due to asset availability challenges. Specifically, in fiscal year 2022, mechanical problems prevented the Coast Guard from deploying a major cutter to the Bering Sea as planned, resulting in a 27-day coverage gap. To help address these types of gaps, the Coast Guard plans to acquire 28 new cutters, including at least 3 new icebreakers.

¹⁴ GAO-24-106491. Coast Guard officials also cited the COVID-19 pandemic and environmental factors, such as the presence of sea ice that can limit major cutter access to areas north of the Bering Strait, as other factors affecting the Coast Guard's ability to meet its strategic commitments in the Arctic.

This program also faces a pending cost increase that puts pressure on the Coast Guard's resource-constrained acquisition budget. At the same time, the Coast Guard has a backlog of shore infrastructure projects that is contributing to affordability concerns for recapitalization and related efforts to sustain existing and planned assets. Collectively, these factors will continue to limit the operational availability of Coast Guard assets in the Arctic region, jeopardizing the service's ability to meet its Arctic strategy goals and conduct planning efforts to address known capability gaps.

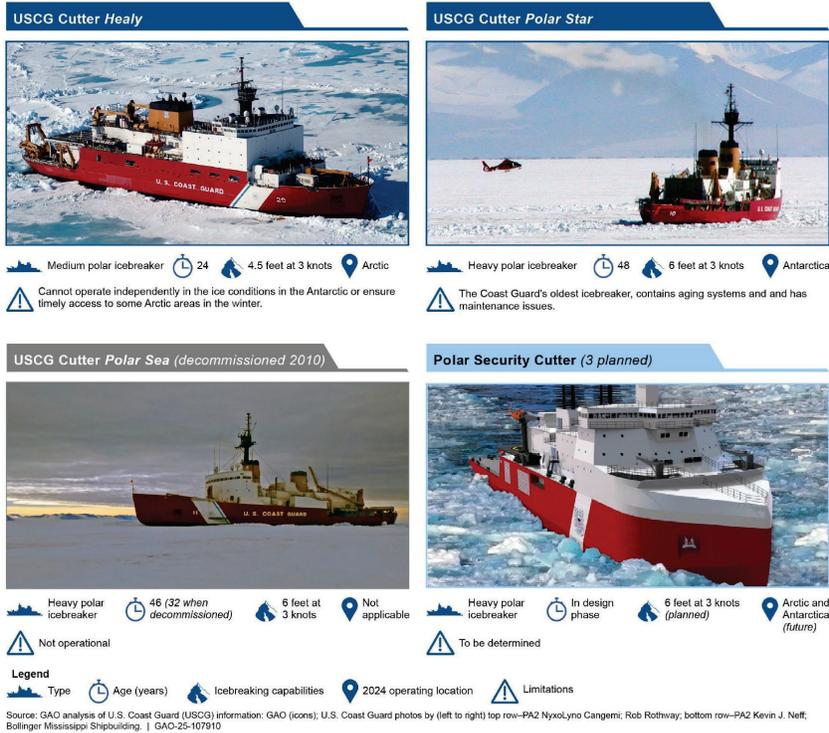
The Coast Guard's Polar Security Cutter Program Continues to Experience Significant Schedule Delays and Pending Cost Increases

To address operational challenges and meet its strategic commitments in the Arctic, the Coast Guard plans to acquire three new Polar Security Cutters capable of traversing the Arctic and Antarctic regions (see fig. 1).¹⁵ These ships will be the first heavy polar icebreakers that any U.S. government agency has acquired in almost 50 years.¹⁶ However, until these ships are fully operational, the Coast Guard has assessed that it currently does not have the capability to assure continuous presence and reliable access to the Arctic.

¹⁵In addition to these three new heavy polar icebreakers, the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 includes a provision that authorized \$150 million for the acquisition or procurement of a United States built available icebreaker. See Pub. L. No. 117-263, div. K, tit. CXI, § 11104(a)(5), tit. CXII, subtit. C, § 11223(a), 136 Stat. 2395, 4004, 4021. The Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 includes a provision appropriating over \$1.41 billion for necessary expenses of the Coast Guard for procurement, construction, and improvements, including vessels and aircraft. See Pub. L. No. 118-47, div. C, tit II, 138 Stat. 460, 600. The joint explanatory statement for the act includes a provision specifying that \$125 million is provided for procurement of a commercially available polar icebreaker. See Staff of H.R. Comm. on App., 118th Cong., Joint Explanatory Statement for Division C—Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act 31 (Comm. Print 2024).

¹⁶The Coast Guard's current polar icebreaking fleet comprises two operational polar icebreakers—the *Polar Star* and *Healy*. The *Polar Star*, a heavy icebreaker, has operated in the Arctic. For example, in 2021, it went to the Arctic to support science missions. However, only the *Healy* is currently active and operating in the Arctic. The *Healy* is a medium icebreaker that primarily supports Arctic research. While it is capable of carrying out a wide range of activities, it cannot ensure timely access to some Arctic areas in the winter given that it does not have the icebreaking capabilities of a heavy polar icebreaker. An additional Coast Guard heavy icebreaker, the *Polar Sea*, has been inactive since 2010 when it experienced a catastrophic engine failure.

Figure 1: Coast Guard Operational, Decommissioned, and Planned Fleet of Polar Icebreakers, 2024



Since 2016, we have issued several reports and made 27 recommendations addressing the status of Coast Guard acquisition programs, including seven recommendations related to the Polar Security Cutter program, which is at least 4 years behind schedule.¹⁷ Our prior work found that four primary factors contributed to the Polar Security Cutter program delays, according to program officials: (1) lack of shipbuilder experience designing and building polar icebreakers; (2) complexity of the design; (3) significant changes from the original design; and (4) COVID-19 pandemic impacts.¹⁸ As of April 2024, the program had not yet established an updated schedule. A preliminary draft schedule projected a lead ship delivery by the end of 2029.

The Polar Security Cutter program has also been subject to significant cost growth, with the full extent yet to be determined. As of 2023, the Coast Guard planned to invest about \$3 billion to acquire the three Polar Security Cutters and \$9 billion to maintain them.¹⁹ However, in November 2023, based on updated cost data, the program determined it required additional funding of at least \$600 million (or 20 percent) above its previous threshold.²⁰ Moreover, an April 2024 Congressional Budget Office estimate showed costs for the program, not including maintenance, increasing by over 60 percent, to \$5.1 billion. As we previously reported, the issues affecting the Polar Security Cutter program raise questions about scheduled

¹⁷ See GAO-23-105949; GAO-23-105805; GAO-21-9; GAO-18-600; GAO-18-454; GAO-17-698R; and GAO-16-148.

¹⁸ GAO-23-105949.

¹⁹ The Coast Guard also plans to procure a Great Lakes heavy icebreaker to augment its only heavy domestic icebreaker in the region. We recently reported on the Coast Guard's domestic icebreaking capability; see GAO-24-106619.

²⁰ GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisition: Actions Needed to Address Affordability Challenges*, GAO-24-107584 (Washington, D.C.: June 12, 2024).

delivery of these ships, as well as the affordability of this program in a constrained budget environment.²¹

In the interim period before its fleet of new polar icebreakers are complete, the Coast Guard anticipates it will have a reduced number of ships available for Arctic operations. To mitigate this, the Coast Guard is relying on its aged fleet of existing polar icebreakers. While these ships have generally maintained operations, their continued use increases the risk they will fail before they are replaced. For example, the Coast Guard is annually accomplishing its Antarctic mission with its sole existing heavy polar icebreaker, the *Polar Star*, which is 48 years old and well beyond its 30-year service life. However, there is no backup if the *Polar Star* becomes inoperable before the Polar Security Cutters are delivered. We have an ongoing review that discusses the Coast Guard's role and how its current polar icebreakers enable it to operate in the Arctic; how the Coast Guard analyzed its polar icebreaking needs; and the extent to which it has considered options to expand the future fleet. We expect to issue a report on the results of this review in fall 2024.

The Estimated Cost of the Coast Guard's Backlog of Shore Infrastructure Projects Has More than Doubled Since 2019

The Coast Guard uses its shore infrastructure assets—such as piers, maintenance buildings, and warehouses—to support legacy assets such as polar icebreakers and other major cutters that operate in the Arctic region. However, the estimated cost of the Coast Guard's shore infrastructure project backlog has more than doubled since 2019, according to our preliminary 2024 analysis. In February 2019, we found that the Coast Guard had a backlog of shore infrastructure projects related to docks, air stations, and other assets that totaled at least \$2.6 billion. We made six recommendations to address these issues, two of which the Coast Guard has fully implemented.²² However, as of November 2024, our preliminary analysis of Coast Guard data found that the estimated cost of this backlog exceeded \$7 billion and included over 1,900 recapitalization, new major construction, and deferred maintenance projects.²³ Moreover, our analysis of the Coast Guard's fiscal year 2024 shore infrastructure project list found that 235 of the projects lacked cost estimates, making it difficult to determine the costs of addressing many of these projects.²⁴

In conclusion, the Coast Guard faces growing responsibilities to assess and manage risks to safety and security in the Arctic region as conditions continue to change. The Coast Guard has taken actions to manage these risks by including them in strategic planning documents and deploying cutters and aircraft to the U.S. Arctic region during peak maritime activity. The Coast Guard has also initiated plans to acquire new polar icebreakers to enhance its capabilities in the region. However, the Coast Guard Arctic implementation plan—a key planning document used to inform its efforts in the region—does not include key metrics that would help the Coast Guard plan activities, determine resource needs, and assess its progress toward strategic objectives. Further, continued delays in delivering the Polar Security Cutter increase the likelihood of operational capability gaps in the region. As we previously reported, the Coast Guard faces service-wide limitations that can affect its ability to plan for, and meet, its strategic commitments in the Arctic region and throughout its operating domain. Implementation of our recommendations would help the Coast Guard manage its Arctic-related resource needs. It would also help ensure that the service makes progress toward achieving its strategic objectives and remains aligned with national Arctic priorities.

Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Carbajal, and Members of the Subcommittee, this completes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you very much for your testimony, all three of you.

Now, we turn to questions from the panel. I recognize myself for 5 minutes for questions.

²¹ See GAO-24-107584; GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisitions: Opportunities Exist To Improve Shipbuilding Outcomes*, GAO-24-107488 (Washington, D.C.: May 7, 2024); and GAO, *Coast Guard Recapitalization: Actions Needed To Better Manage Acquisition Programs And Address Affordability Concerns*, GAO-23-106948 (Washington, D.C.: July 27, 2023).

²² GAO-19-82.

²³ These include projects for the acquisition, procurement, construction, rebuilding, and improvement of Coast Guard buildings such as military housing or cutter support facilities, as well as maintenance on structures such as aircraft hangars or boat docks.

²⁴ We have an ongoing review that updates our 2019 work on the Coast Guard's shore infrastructure portfolio. We expect to issue a report on the results of this review in 2025.

Admiral Gautier, Russia has 55 icebreakers, and China, which is not even an Arctic nation, has 4 and more on the way. For the foreseeable future, we have two, and hopefully a third if the Coast Guard can find or acquire a commercially available icebreaker.

How does the mismatch in capabilities impact the Coast Guard's Arctic operations, and how can the Service effectively project sovereignty and protect our Nation's vast resources in the Arctic when confronting increasing aggressive behavior by China and Russia?

Admiral GAUTIER. Chairman, our ability, as United States Coast Guard, and as a Nation, to do the things that you described to project our sovereignty and ensure our interests are met, we would like to say that presence equals influence. You have to be there physically in order to assure our own sovereignty. That requires for the United States a surface presence, which means icebreakers, in terms of getting access to ice-covered, ice-filled waters.

Now, with regards to the difference that you describe, Russia having 55 icebreakers, PRC having two medium and now two recently constructed light icebreakers, we are concerned about the growing gap between the United States Coast Guard's icebreaking capability and our competitors' capability, especially as we see them operating more often and more often together in Arctic waters.

This is why it is so important to have your enduring support for icebreaker growth in what we describe in our fleet mix analysis to having eight to nine Coast Guard heavy and medium icebreakers as a mix so we can be present to shape the international rules-based order, to check our adversaries when they do wrong, and to make sure that our national interests are met.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you for your answer.

I am hoping that there is also coming with that nine necessary vessels some sort of timeline. We would really appreciate it.

Admiral Allan, as I mentioned in my opening statement, this subcommittee was told nearly 1 year ago that we would soon receive a plan to procure the Service's much needed fleet of PSCs. To date, we have yet to see such a plan, let alone a cost estimate or a timeline of the first vessel in the fleet.

On September 26th, the committee sent a bipartisan letter asking that by November 15th, the Service provide the committee with a determination on: reaching sufficient design maturity to allow for a decision to proceed to full production, whether the prototype modules of hull 1 can be used in construction, the cost estimate for the first PSC, the timeline for construction, and whether the funds appropriated to date for the PSC program will be sufficient to cover the cost of the first PSC.

These are all items which the Service has said it will provide by the end of the year. Unfortunately, the response we received ahead of this hearing did not provide any meaningful answers to our questions. What actual metrics and data are you able to share today to assure us that the PSC program is moving forward? When will you be able to communicate an updated timeline and the cost estimate?

Admiral ALLAN. Sir, thank you for the question.

I think in June, we came and saw this subcommittee. We said by the end of this calendar year, we would be back to say that we

are moving forward with a production decision through DHS. I am still confident that that is where we are headed.

Right now, we had a final critical design review on September 23rd. When we got there, Bollinger Marine Shipyard is doing incredible things to raise the percentage of completion of our design. We are over 80 percent, and that was as of September 3rd. I think we are going to have our procurement readiness review in November, and we are going to see that we are even further.

We are continuing to negotiate with them on cost. We are continuing to work with them for the production readiness review with our prototype fabrication assets that are really providing the baseline and the foundation of the Polar Security Cutter.

What I think is, sir, we are going to seek from DHS in mid-December an approval for a production decision, and we will have that by the end of this calendar year.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Okay. Well, we are counting on it.

My time has expired. So, let's see.

Mr. Larsen, you are recognized for questions.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Admiral Allan, where does the planning, funding, and construction of Base Seattle project currently stand? And how is Coast Guard continuing to engage the relevant stakeholders there?

Admiral ALLAN. Sir, thank you for that question.

Seattle is going to be a very important launching point for our Polar Security Cutters to do the missions we need within the Arctic and Antarctic.

Right now, we are able to receive \$100 million in 2024. We are completing our environmental impact statement for how we would put those Polar Security Cutters in at the base there in Seattle, working with the Port of Tacoma and Port of Seattle. That will be out in the Federal Register this Saturday.

In addition, we are working to put out a record decision and then looking at the \$180 million that we think we need in fiscal year 2025 to keep this project going. It is going to be expensive to bring these new cutters into a very compact area and put them where they need to be with the infrastructure support that they need to make sure that they are ready to go as we talked about with eight to nine of them over time and continued presence up in the Arctic and Antarctic.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Is that the DEIS on Saturday?

Admiral ALLAN. Yes, sir. The PEIS, yes, sir.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. The draft. Okay.

And then how are you engaging with the stakeholders there?

Admiral ALLAN. So, sir, we have been up there a couple times. I am going to be there again next Thursday to talk to them. Now that our Federal Register announcement will be out, they will be able to see what our alternatives are and the one that we have selected as the best for the Coast Guard.

But we know this is a negotiation, and we know this is a partnership. So, we are going to be working closely with them to figure out the best way forward, not only for the Coast Guard, not only for the Nation, but the Port of Seattle and the Port of Tacoma.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Ms. MacLeod, which of the GAO's open recommendations for the Coast Guard's icebreaker programs

are the highest priority both with respect to the urgency and the potential for benefit?

Ms. MACLEOD. GAO's multiple recommendations regarding the Polar Security Cutter are very important, especially at this time. Key to one of our recommendations would be that this design stability is reached before construction of the Polar Security Cutters to avoid future cost increases.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. How has the Coast Guard and the Navy partnership worked? The whole idea of having the Navy be part of this was to bring the Navy's experience into the design, the development. But it doesn't seem to have worked as planned.

Ms. MACLEOD. GAO's report is the partnership between the Navy and the Coast Guard has worked well for this procurement, these procurements. I think that there is a range of reasons for the delays from contractor to Coast Guard acquisition and experience. But the partnership itself seems to be working well and has benefited the Coast Guard.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Admiral Allan, how is the Coast Guard planning to address the remaining open recommendations, which are double digits?

Admiral ALLAN. So, sir, I think when you look at the recommendations that they are making, it is always good to have someone looking over your shoulder, correcting your work, and I think they are providing us a lot of goodness as far as that goes.

I think what we are trying to do is make sure that we are incorporating as many of those recommendations in the way forward because I think they have the same goals as we do. Do we have schedule right, and do we have cost right? And the more we can do up front, that will allow us to stop going over budget or over our time schedule.

So, we are looking at each one of those. I think we are trading off and on of what those percentages are. I don't think we will be at 100 percent when we finally get to full design, but I think when you look at where we are at and how we are going and how we are building these Polar Security Cutters, we will have substantially complied with the recommendations that GAO is making.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Well, as noted earlier, the last one was built before John Rayfield joined this committee, I would like to get the next one built before he leaves the committee.

Admiral ALLAN. Sir, we are barreling ahead to make sure that he sees one of these.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you, Representative Larsen.

Mr. Babin, you are recognized.

Dr. BABIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, witnesses. I appreciate you being here.

As the sea ice in the Arctic recedes, Arctic routes remain open for longer periods of time. We are all reading about that. They are staying open each year longer. This has resulted in a drastic increase in military and civilian maritime traffic.

Just last month, China's Coast Guard claimed to transit the Arctic Sea for the first time, and both Russia and China have an-

nounced their intentions to take advantage of the new shipping routes.

Over the long term, how does the Coast Guard plan to meet the threats of our adversaries and protect freedom of movement in the Arctic?

And this is for your, Admiral Gautier.

Admiral GAUTIER. Congressman, in a couple of different ways. First is through resource growth. And we actually have made tremendous progress in doing things like recapitalizing our C-130 fleet from an older C-130H to a C-130J in Kodiak. By shifting our helicopter fleet from a mixed H-60 and H-65 fleet into an all H-60 fleet out of Kodiak. It is by homeporting additional Fast Response Cutters. It is by bringing this commercially available icebreaker into play in terms of that.

We have a long way to go, and I think that is the theme of this particular hearing in terms of the growth necessary in terms of Polar Security Cutters.

But, sir, we also need to operate differently, and that is why we are investing more in forward operating locations where we put our helicopters and our Coast Guard members closer to the area of operations, where the fishermen are moving and where our competitors are operating.

Dr. BABIN. Yes, sir. Thank you very much.

And also, for whoever can answer this, Admiral Allan or anyone else, Ms. MacLeod, you, too, we have been following the icebreaker collaboration effort, or ICE Pact between the United States, Canada, and Finland. And I understand just yesterday, our Nation signed a new memorandum of understanding on icebreakers. In yesterday's press release, I saw the memorandum of understanding included, and I quote, "the exchange of knowledge, information, and resources in each of our countries."

Given the timeliness of this hearing, I would like to give you just a minute to discuss what you see in terms of the expectations of this committee, and Congress at-large, to support this new initiative. If you could specifically dive into the word "resources" piece here and what you expect Congress to be involved with, I would sure be very appreciative.

Admiral?

Admiral GAUTIER. Congressman, yes, in keeping with the nature of your question, we are pretty excited about the promise of ICE Pact. As you mentioned, it was signed yesterday. Secretary Mayorkas was the signatory on behalf of the United States.

This is a launching pad for a tremendous amount of possibility. With the collaboration of the U.S. and two of our allies, we really think that there is a lot of promise in terms of sharing the research and development, information technologies, workforce knowledge, and so on, that it will better enable us to collectively build more and more capable icebreakers at better cost moving into the future.

We have just begun to form a number of work groups. The Coast Guard is in charge of two of them. So, we will all have to stay tuned on the progress made and how we can collaborate with Congress to make this a success.

Dr. BABIN. Thank you.

I still have some time left, so, I wanted to ask another question.

The Coast Guard and Navy are planning to invest more than \$11.8 billion to build and maintain three Polar Security Cutter heavy icebreakers. The first ship was scheduled for delivery this year, but, at this point, we are hoping to get it before the end of the decade, lamentably.

Given the importance of Arctic operations, what is being done to prevent operational gaps?

Admiral ALLAN. So, sir, I will just say, or reiterate, we are looking forward to making an announcement to Congress by the end of this year that we are moving forward with production on that Polar Security Cutter. But as you say, we have got to deliver that in 2030.

One of the good news stories I think and through the help of this committee and others, the commercially available polar icebreaker, we are also going to say that we are going to have that in the Coast Guard inventory by the end of this fiscal year.

If you were to take a look at it today, it is painted about one-quarter of the way Coast Guard icebreaker red. It is underway today with a team from the owners and ABS doing an evaluation, and in the future weeks, we are going to be able to get on that vessel and be able to understand how we can operate that within the Arctic. And it is a proven vessel that has operated in the Antarctic and the Arctic.

We will need that \$25 million in fiscal year 2025 to crew and provision that vessel, but I think we are working to close those gaps through some of our acquisition programs.

Dr. BABIN. Excellent. Thank you, Admiral, very much.

I am out of time, Mr. Chairman, so, I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you very much.

Representative Carbajal, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Admiral Allan, the Coast Guard icebreaking requires Coasties to operate the cutters. You are currently operating down 10 percent of your workforce. Are you confident that you will have the requisite personnel to operate and maintain the PSCs while conducting other missions?

Admiral ALLAN. Sir, thank you for that question.

One of the things I like to say is that we are making great advancements on bringing crews into the Coast Guard. Last year, in fiscal year 2024, that was our best year for bringing people into the Coast Guard since 2007. That is across Activity Duty, Reserve, and our Enlisted workforce.

We have all of our companies that are going into Cape May full up through March. So, we are starting to close that gap, but we have got a long way to go, especially with the growth that we have.

So, we are going to continue to work with this committee and work with others to understand where our highest priority needs are, how we are moving people to those areas, and making sure that we are continuing to bring in recruits at the highest numbers we can based upon our support infrastructure to meet that need.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Moreover, do we have the infrastructure available to house and support these members assigned to these assets, whether in Seattle or Alaska?

Admiral ALLAN. Sir, thank you for that question.

I think when the Commandant was here in front of you, she told you that the Coast Guard needs to be a \$20 billion organization by 2033, and that we need to have a \$3 billion PC&I budget immediately growing to \$4 billion by 2033.

I will tell you that as we make tradeoffs within our own budget, a lot of times we are trading offshore infrastructure. We are trying to bring in the capabilities, the OPCs, the PSCs, the 60s and C-130s, and we are relying on Congress' help through the unfunded priority list to help us with that shore infrastructure.

So, no, I don't think we have that in there right now, and I think that that is important to our people.

I just was a district commander in a recent job, and I would go out to our stations that are falling apart and watch as we are losing crewmembers to the local fire department, the local police department that had just upgraded their facilities and assets that they are using.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Ms. MacLeod, while we have discussed several factors that have delayed the Polar Security Cutter program, we cannot ignore that this is the first attempt to construct a heavy icebreaker on U.S. soil in over 50 years. Undoubtedly, our underdeveloped shipbuilding industry has also challenged the Coast Guard's efforts.

How can Congress continue to invest in our domestic shipbuilding industry so that it can best support the Coast Guard's icebreaker programs? And how is that partnership with the Navy going?

Admiral ALLAN. Sir, I think as you look at that partnership, we need that partnership. But, more importantly, we need that national industrial base to increase in size. It needs to be not an investment on individual ships but an investment on how we are doing that across the Nation.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Admiral Allan, but that question was directed to Ms. MacLeod. I apologize if I . . .

Ms. MACLEOD. For sure, there has been a lack of U.S. shipbuilding experience that has definitely contributed to the issues that we are discussing today. It is something that we continue to look at, the types of experience that can be leveraged here in the United States going forward.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, actually, I have a little bit more time.

Admiral Allan, back to you.

Budgetary decisions associated with the procurement of icebreakers cannot be made in a vacuum. The maintenance backlog of your shoreside infrastructure is growing at an alarming rate, affecting the housing, workstations, docks, and shoreside facilities needed to homeport PSCs.

What will happen if Congress and the Coast Guard do not address the shoreside infrastructure backlog?

Admiral ALLAN. Sir, thank you for that question.

When you look at the Coast Guard's shore infrastructure, we are a \$24 billion organization. We should be investing \$500 million to \$1 billion in that infrastructure every year to make sure that it is maintained at a modern standard to support our people.

Without it, we watch people making decisions because they are living in facilities that they aren't proud of or can't do their mission. We are watching as we are putting more and more of our maintenance dollars into facilities that are failing that should have been replaced long ago.

So, I think it is a very important part for us not only to look at the assets that we are bringing on but the shore infrastructure to make sure that it is in line with the expectations that people would have where they want their sons and daughters serving.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

I am out of time, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you.

And, Mr. Ezell, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to all our witnesses for being here again. And Admiral Allan, it is good to see you again. I appreciate all of you very much.

As we focus on the Coast Guard's icebreaker recapitalization efforts and their abilities to meet the needs, I want to place an important emphasis on our adversaries, Russia and China, and the threat that they pose.

I am proud that Bollinger Shipyard has stepped up to the plate to help the Service meet its goals and combat our adversaries. Bollinger's commitment to building the first U.S.-made heavy icebreaker in over 50 years underscores their dedication to national security and creating jobs here at home.

When Bollinger acquired VT Halter, the latter had amassed one-quarter of a billion dollars in losses on the PSC program.

Fast-forward to today, Bollinger has invested over \$100 million in Mississippi, and the returns have been almost immediate. Bollinger has also expanded its Mississippi workforce by nearly 50 percent. Its new construction workforce in Mississippi alone has more than doubled.

Future success will require strong coordination, flexibility, and the willingness to solve problems as they arise. Effective and realistic planning, budgeting, and funding allocations are going to be critical for the success of shipbuilding programs.

Endless studies by the Government failed to produce realistic assessments, which diminished competition among American shipyards.

Admiral Gautier—"Gochay" as we say it in Mississippi—I want to discuss some of these funding efforts. We know that there is a shortfall in funding. Uncertainty surrounding award methods have led to reallocating funds from other programs from fiscal year to fiscal year. This cycle further destabilizes the domestic maritime industry.

Why did the Coast Guard not request funding for the PSC program for 2025?

Admiral GAUTIER. Congressman, if it is all right, it is probably better for Admiral Allan to answer that question.

Admiral ALLAN. So, sir, I think the reason we didn't request in 2025 is we are looking to get ahead of the curve. Right now we have the money we need based upon the progress we make.

However, to your point, we have seen a lot of that progress made in just a short period because Bollinger Mississippi Shipyard has

been involved, has been engaged, and they are bringing in the right people to make this thing not just an idea but a way forward. So, we are looking forward to doing that.

I think we will be requesting additional money for our ship, but I think that will come as we finalize arrangements and negotiate the final cost.

Mr. EZELL. Very good.

Going back to the activity by our adversaries, I was encouraged that on the very first page of your testimony, you addressed the increased presence of the PRC and Russia, including unilateral and combined military and Coast Guard activities we are seeing now in the U.S. Arctic.

Can you please expand a little bit on how the Coast Guard's Arctic strategy and implementation addresses these concerns?

Admiral GAUTIER. Congressman, first off, the increased presence that we are seeing from PRC forces, both Navy and Coast Guard, is not a surprise because they have actually told us they intended on doing that through their Arctic strategy in terms of having increased presence up there. So, not a surprise to us.

Our key element here is to meet presence with presence to assure our national sovereignty. Usually, they are there seasonally in the summertime, although it has been going later into the fall. So, we have been mobilizing some additional National Security Cutter time to operate in and along the maritime boundary line and in the Aleutians to make sure that in conjunction with the Department of Defense, because they also share a presence and a responsibility there, that we are there when our competitors are in or near our exclusive economic zones.

We also overfly as well with our Coast Guard aircraft out of Kodiak.

Mr. EZELL. Very good.

What would you say to those who raise concerns that the plan does not include key metrics, such as performance measures or timeframes for action items? Are these tracked anywhere?

Admiral GAUTIER. Yes, we support the findings in that regard that GAO put in their report, and we are taking steps to address that. I will just say—and some of these elements are enduring, and many of them are dependent on factors outside of the Coast Guard's purview in terms of, say, budgeting certainty and so on.

But, in large part, we are making substantial progress across those lines of effort that we put into our implementation plan for the strategy.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you.

And I appreciate all of your hard work. We have total confidence in the United States Coast Guard, and as long as I am sitting here, we are going to continue to support you.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you very much.

Mr. Garamendi, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This is tiresome. We have gone round and round on this for more than a decade, and we still are looking at another half a decade at the best to get a heavy icebreaker.

The GAO report, unfortunately, doesn't get into the details of why we are so far behind and into the intricacies of Bollinger's successes and failures. We need to know that.

The other, I think, Admiral Gautier, you said something. It sounded like "budget." I think you used that word. That's money and the appropriation.

The bottom line here, I am going to ask you guys, is there a national security threat in the Arctic as a result of the inability of the United States to have a presence in the Arctic?

Admiral GAUTIER. Congressman, we have not failed as a United States Coast Guard, year end and year out, to have assured presence with our Coast Guard assets. Cannot guarantee that moving forward as adversaries' presence increases, as the conditions of our current two icebreakers age, and until we get recapitalized new cutters in the theater.

Mr. GARAMENDI. So, this year, or this last summer, your answer is it was not a threat to our national security. You were able to have the necessary presence. Did I hear you say that next year there may be a national security threat for lack of an operable icebreaker capacity in the Arctic?

Admiral GAUTIER. Congressman, I acknowledge we have a national security threat now from increased presence of competitors and working together in ways that we have not seen yet. The challenge is how do we mitigate, ameliorate that threat through Coast Guard and U.S.—

Mr. GARAMENDI [interrupting]. How do we mitigate that threat?

Admiral GAUTIER. I'm sorry?

Mr. GARAMENDI. How do we mitigate that threat?

Admiral GAUTIER. By being present with our asset.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Can we be present given the present icebreakers that we have?

Admiral GAUTIER. I'm sorry?

Mr. GARAMENDI. Can we be present given the icebreakers that we currently have?

Admiral GAUTIER. We have been and we can continue, but we are at risk without recapitalizing these icebreakers to be present.

Mr. GARAMENDI. To recapitalize, have you given this committee the specific number of vessels or icebreakers that we need and when we need them?

Admiral GAUTIER. The Coast Guard believes that we need eight to nine icebreakers.

Mr. GARAMENDI. When do you need them?

Admiral GAUTIER. As soon as possible.

Mr. GARAMENDI. That's not an answer. When do you need them? Tomorrow? Next year?

Admiral GAUTIER. I think—

Mr. GARAMENDI [interrupting]. When do you need them?

Admiral GAUTIER. We have a sense of urgency—

Mr. GARAMENDI [interrupting]. Listen, what I am trying to do is to put on the record here that we've got one very serious national security problem. Don't dance around. The fact of the matter is, we will not have a presence in the Arctic. We know where the *Polar Star* is. Eventually you are not going to be able to cannibalize other icebreakers to maintain the *Polar Star*.

The bottom line here is, there is a national security threat of great significance as a result of the inability of the Coast Guard to have adequate presence in the Arctic. Do you agree or disagree with me?

Admiral GAUTIER. I agree.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Very good. Now, what does it take? Eight to ten icebreakers, of which three are heavy icebreakers, which will probably be able to be delivered sometime around 2040. Is that correct?

Admiral GAUTIER. It is going to take a long time to produce—

Mr. GARAMENDI [interrupting]. A long time. A decade. Minimum of a decade, for the first one, and then who knows for the next two and the third one.

Bottom line here—and this is really for us [indicating the subcommittee]—we have continually underfunded the Coast Guard icebreaker program—continually. And unfortunately, the Coast Guard has not sounded the red alarm and laid down: “Give us the money or we cannot do it.”

So, we are going to have to come forward here with the money necessary to do it. The question is: Can it be built in the United States in a timely manner? There is plenty of indication the answer is: We ain’t doing very well now.

So, we are going to have to rethink this. We are going to have to rethink it. If you need 8 to 10 now, next year, year after next, the only way we are going to do it is to rethink how we are going to get those icebreakers.

Made in America, nobody’s been stronger on that than I have over these years, but we are failing. Our industrial base has failed us, and frankly, the Coast Guard has failed us by not sounding an alarm loud.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the time.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you very much.

Mr. Van Drew, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Dr. VAN DREW. Me? Okay, I didn’t hear you, Chairman. Thank you, Chairman.

Let me start by saying I want to associate myself with the remarks that Mr. Garamendi made. I think he is on target, and he is on point, and I want to dig into that a little bit.

In most areas, our military is well positioned to protect our homeland and our allies abroad. There does seem to be an alarming gap in the Arctic Circle, and I think you would all agree with that.

Quite frankly, I think most Americans would be surprised how big the gap is. When you consider that Russia alone has 55, am I correct, 55 cutters? And we have, at most, two, correct? That is unbelievable, just that statistic alone.

So, we’ve got to do everything in our power to ensure the necessary provisions are in place so we can bridge the gap in the Arctic and continue to protect our people and our allies.

And I want to say, and I think we all know, that I am more than willing to work across the aisle, I am more than willing to work with everybody on this, I think we all are. It is dire.

The main competition that we have is Russia and China. This is serious stuff. Russia, like I said, has 55, and they are going to ex-

pand their fleet. China is expanding their fleet. I mean, this is a big deal. It really is.

So, before I even go on, I want to get something clear in my mind, and Vice Admiral Allan, thank you for being here. I really do appreciate you. I know I ask hard questions. It's not a personal thing. It is really concern. And I respect the work that you all do. I want you to know that.

But based on your response to my colleague from Mississippi, does that not mean the Coast Guard has sufficient appropriated money to complete polar security ice-cutter 1? Do you believe that we have enough money to complete it? I think I know the answer.

Admiral ALLAN. Sir, we do not have enough money to complete the number 1. The question is: How much more do we need? And we think by December we will understand, final contract negotiations, what that dollar amount is, and what gap exists.

Dr. VAN DREW. Because we, again, in a bipartisan way, want to try to fight for that. I mean, it is everything. I mean, I think this is kind of bipartisan at least with most folks—peace through strength. I mean, we need the strength. And it is scary to me. I don't know that we have the strength there.

Regardless of all the other things that you are doing, and, Vice Admiral Gautier, I listened to what you said, and I appreciate those things, but we don't have the money, and we have got to start—the way this place works is making the request, putting in for it, advocating for it, fighting for it, so that you get what you need. Everybody's at the trough, everybody's competing, but this is stuff that crosses all boundaries and is really serious and real important.

I am curious—I wrote some of the questions down I wanted to ask—how did we get here? How did, how did we—Congressman Garamendi said that it has been going on for a decade. That is longer than I have been here. This is my third term, and I can remember this discussion even now, which is on my sixth year.

How did we get here? How did this multiple administrations through time, what went wrong? Something went wrong. We shouldn't have fallen this far behind. Please give me a candid and blunt answer.

Admiral ALLAN. Yes, sir. So, what I would say is, the Coast Guard is a capital-intensive organization in the nondefense side of budget authorities.

When you look at that, our percentage of increase every year is much lower than what DoD is, so, we fall further and further behind each year. Creates our requirements to, almost as a flat line since 2010, to make tradeoffs, and a lot of those tradeoffs are keeping assets going, as opposed to reacquiring what we need.

As the Commandant said, we need to be a \$20 billion organization with 5 percent growth. That needs to happen by 2033, or, to your point, sir, we are not going to be able to deliver the Coast Guard that the Nation is asking us to have—

Dr. VAN DREW [interrupting]. As we spoke yesterday about a different subject, and I appreciated your input and candor with that, I mean, with the cost of everything going up, it is of major, major concern with the inflation we have, which is still there. Costs are going up, as you know, exponentially in some cases.

I think we need—I would love to see us turn a page. You tell us what you need. Now, we can't guarantee just on this one subcommittee that we can deliver that, but, again, across the aisle—and, again, I associate myself with the remarks Congressman Garamendi, the gentleman from California, made.

I want it to sort of stop. I want to turn a new page. I want you to be working with us, that we are advocating hard. If we fail, so be it, but we should know what hill we are fighting on, what we are fighting for, how much we need, what we want to do. We really got to get focused here.

This can't—I don't want it to go on for another 10 or 20 or 30 years. I don't want it to go on to where we have a confrontation, and literally the greatest country on the face of the Earth can't deal with it. This is serious, serious stuff.

Ms. MacLeod, can you highlight the strategic advantages that Russia and China have over the United States when it comes to these assets? I know you know your stuff. I know you have done it already, but we just want to hear it again.

Ms. MACLEOD. Quantity of icebreakers, in short, assets in the Arctic.

Dr. VAN DREW. You know how heartbreaking that is for me to hear America, the greatest country on the face of the Earth, and let's call it what it is, is behind. We are behind. We are behind Russia. We are going to be behind China. Maybe we are already, I don't know.

And I don't want that to get worse. I don't think any Member here wants it to get worse. It is important stuff.

I guess I have used up my time. I appreciate your service, I really do, and I am not blaming you, but I am blaming the process. We absolutely have to do better on this.

I don't want to look back someday, you know, you worry about your children, your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren, man, we got to—we lead, we are America, we don't want to fall behind.

With that, I yield back to the chairman.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Mrs. Peltola, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So, the benefit of being a low-ranking Member is that most of the questions have been asked. And I am really thankful that there have been a couple Members here who have really been trying to dig deep on why the Coast Guard is so in the hole.

And my reluctance to talk about this is: Why would I want to disadvantage the United States even further by putting on the public record our vulnerabilities?

But it has also been really frustrating, having known a couple of your Enlisted members personally and having visited where they are stationed, the vessels they are on, hearing about how old the helicopters are.

It is frustrating because I have been in this committee when Representative Carbajal has been, like, begging you, the Coast Guard, to give us a list of what you need. I mean, like, we are standing on the tables jumping up and down, saying, how can we help you, and wanting you to stand up on the tables and jump up and down and shout back how we can help you.

I know that there is concern about the Coast Guard being gobbled up into DoD and swallowed up by the Navy, and nobody wants that. I am such a fan of the culture of the Coast Guard and the work that you do and the way that you train people, and as an Alaskan, of the services you provide.

And this is a really interesting committee, and given that I probably won't be here after December, it seems like, why would I stick around to ask questions? But since this is about the Arctic, and I am the one Member on this committee from the Arctic, I am curious.

How are there 11 icebreakers in Michigan in the Great Lakes, which are not Arctic or polar, and we are going to get one coming up someday soon for Alaska? And how does Alaska get more resources?

And one of the things I will say is, I am very hopeful that since there won't be any tug-of-war between the parties in any of the Chambers or the White House, there should be a concerted effort just to resource-up.

And I was glad to hear Representative Van Drew talk about his concerns and all the Members on the right-hand side because it is now their time to shine. There are no excuses for saying, well, somebody didn't like somebody on the other side because of personalities or whatever. Now is the time.

I had prepared questions about Alaska, but I guess I want you to talk more about what your needs are in a delicate way so we are not announcing it to all of our adversaries, but tell us how we can help you. Tell us a number. Give us a number to shoot for.

Admiral GAUTIER. Congresswoman, we do deeply appreciate the support of this subcommittee. You get us, and you have had enduring support for us.

Take, for example, what you authorized, \$3.5, \$3.6 billion in our capital improvement element of the budget. If that could translate to appropriations, that will go a very long way in helping the Coast Guard.

How we also transmit our needs is through the unfunded priorities list, through the budget process, and for the fiscal year 2025, we have \$1.4 billion of things on the unfunded priorities list that are actually quite crucial—just couldn't fit them within our top line—in order to keep the Coast Guard operational, and a number of things that are particularly relevant to Alaska.

We need help recapitalizing our aviation fleet, to move to an all H-60 fleet, so, purchasing more H-60s for the United States Coast Guard so we can pull the older 65s out of service.

We need more C-130Js. We have recapitalized all those in Alaska, but we still have a ways to go in other parts of the country.

We are now decommissioning our Medium Endurance Cutters without replacement, and it is very uncomfortable for us when you look at what is going on, in particular, say, in Haiti and in Cuba, and the potential for a mass migration.

We need money for the Offshore Patrol Cutters so we can get those in play as we decommission our older cutters.

Those needs are replicated in terms of C5I, in terms of the people support, the housing, the childcare centers that we need to make sure we get and retain the best people.

So, the needs are urgent. The unfunded priorities list is a good place to start, and we do appreciate your support.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Okay. The gentlelady yields back.

So, Mr. Graves, you are not a Member, but you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and all the Coasties here, Admirals, and, excuse me, all the folks behind you, I want to thank you for being here, and I appreciate your service.

Admiral, I heard Congressman Van Drew and others talking about the Arctic. Obviously Congresswoman Peltola has been a big advocate and supporter in educating the committee and following in the footsteps of Congressman Don Young in advocating for that State.

You know, the reason that we purchased Alaska was largely the geography, as well as the natural resources, and the abundance of that State is profound and just critically important.

And I think as we have seen in recent trends, the importance of that region strategically grows, and you all have talked much about access to the Arctic in terms of icebreaking capabilities. And, again, I heard Congressman Van Drew talking about the disparity in capabilities in the United States in terms of our heavies.

And I believe the *Healy* being the medium and the awful shape that we have allowed both the *Polar Sea* and *Polar Star* to get into, without having a replacement, and now we are moving forward on that.

We have pushed the Coast Guard now for, gosh, probably the entire time I have been here, to do something to acquire better icebreaking capabilities.

And of course one of the solutions, whenever the withdrawal of energy production in some areas of the Arctic, the *Aiviq* became available, and the Coast Guard pushed back and pushed back, and I thought it was a mistake then, and I think that we were right in our position.

The Coast Guard believed that if they acquired the *Aiviq*, then they weren't going to be able to get the funds from Congress to build a heavy. I think you can do both, and now we are seeing we absolutely need to do both. So, I am glad that the Coast Guard included the *Aiviq* on the unfunded priorities list. I am glad the funds were provided.

Can you now give an update on the status of that acquisition?

Admiral ALLAN. Yes, sir. Thank you for that question, and thanks for the push on the commercially available polar icebreaker. We are making tremendous strides in that with the owner. They have already painted about one-quarter of it Coast Guard icebreaker red. They have got it in the water today with ABS, and they are taking a look at those systems.

And then we are going to be going on board to finalize negotiations and look how we, in a short time, crew that with those commercial operators.

So, it is going to be, I think, within the Coast Guard inventory before the end of this calendar year, and we will be sailing that up into the Arctic in 2026, the spring to summer—

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA [interrupting]. And do I recall that that is going to be homeported in Juneau?

Admiral ALLAN. Yes, sir—

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA [interposing]. Okay.

Admiral ALLAN [continuing]. We are looking to homeport that in Juneau. Of course, there is a big delta there right now, because the pier that has been provided is an old NOAA pier and needs a lot of maintenance and a lot of work, but we are going to strive to at least make sure we have the presence of that vessel up there.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Great. And, Admiral, I appreciate the update. I am doing this from memory which means I may be a little bit off, but as I recall, the Coast Guard had identified some mission capability gaps in regard to the vessel that was designed while providing heavy access. It was designed to provide a little bit different mission.

Can you talk a little bit about some of the mission capability work that needs to be done in order to sort of operationalize that vessel?

Admiral ALLAN. Sir, thank you for that question. I think that is an important change in how we are doing business with this one, right? Before, we usually go through and develop a long list of requirements and then build to meet all those requirements.

This time, we are taking a vessel that has successfully operated in the Arctic, successfully operated in the Antarctic, and we are going to get on board and try to understand what capabilities it has and how we can use those to make some of our needs, not only with presence on presence as we look for sovereignty up in the Alaska area, but also to bring on additional missions where we think we need additional capacity.

We are not sure how that is. We know that we need that vessel. I don't think we are looking to make tremendous investments in that vessel going forward. We just need that for presence and to be able to operate.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Great. Thank you very much. Last question, just because I got a little bit of time left.

Congressman Van Drew again cited the disparity in icebreaking capabilities between the United States and other Arctic nations and including other non-Arctic or Arctic wannabe nations.

Could you just talk a little bit about the importance of domestic shipbuilding capability and how that helps to capitalize or address the Coast Guard's needs?

Admiral ALLAN. Yes, sir. Thank you for that. Down in the gulf region, we have got a bunch of shipyards that are building Coast Guard cutters right now. We have got two shipyards that are building OPCs. We still are building NSCs. We are starting to build a WCC, and we've got the PSC.

What we know is that the need that the Nation has from our industrial base is outstripping the capacity it has. We need help with that.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you. I know I am out of time. Just one closing comment, Mr. Chairman.

Admirals, I want to just really emphasize something. I went round and round with the previous Commandant—won't get into names—about the flaws with the approach on the OPC. And we

have all seen we wasted hundreds of millions of dollars and an extraordinary amount of time.

I think we are now seeing another lessons learned on icebreaking capabilities, and I don't even want to go back to deepwater.

I strongly want to urge, as we move forward, look, all of us are huge supporters. You have an extraordinary mission. You guys are the Swiss Army knife of the sea. We say it all the time.

I really hope that moving forward that we apply the lessons learned in both successes and failures because as Admiral Gautier noted, we have got to make sure you have the capabilities and the resources that you need to do your complex job.

Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Okay. Sounds like we want a second round.

Mr. Garamendi, you are recognized.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Well, maybe I will take half of the 5 minutes very, very quickly.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Okay, half.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Admiral Gautier, you, in your testimony just a moment ago, really came to what we need, and that is, you talked about the unfunded priorities. It is absolutely essential that you give to this committee the obligation to meet the needs of the Coast Guard.

I understand the organization you are working in, it is difficult, but you have got to be very, very clear with us. The unfunded requirements, why are they critical?

We have talked around here back and forth on this. The Arctic is one. In response to our Alaska Representative, you began talking about the shoreside issues. You have got to make that clear to us. Don't be shy. Don't be timid.

Your needs, the needs of this Nation that are carried out by the Coast Guard, will not be achieved unless the Coast Guard comes to us with clarity and the argument: Give us the money or else we will fail to address the challenges in the South Pacific, the challenges in the Caribbean, the challenges in the Arctic. You have got to do that.

I want you to be bold. I want you to take the risk of challenging us, and then the problem is ours. In the 10 years—14 years I have been wrestling with this, the Coast Guard has never said: If you fail to give us the money for these activities, we cannot do our job, and this national security cannot be achieved.

So, I am challenging you: Challenge us—don't dance, come very clear—if we do not have the money for the 8 to 10 icebreakers now or next budget year, we will fail to achieve the necessary presence in the Arctic. Similarly with the other parts of the world.

And it is time for us to realize that you are carrying out activities for the Department of Defense for which you receive no money. The Persian Gulf, the Houthi missiles are delivered by ship—dhows or whatever. The Navy can't board them, so, they call you.

Challenge us. Give us the facts, give us the truth, give us the failure if we fail to fund you. That is our problem.

I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Well, that was a great finale.

Admiral GAUTIER. Sir, got it and support it.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Okay. Well, that brings us to an end of this hearing. It concludes the hearing. We thank you for coming, presenting, answering questions.

We just want to get ships built. That is all we want to do. Tell us how to do it. We will get the money for you. Thank you so much. Meeting adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:26 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

QUESTION TO VICE ADMIRAL PETER W. GAUTIER, DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR OPERATIONS, U.S. COAST GUARD, FROM HON. JEFFERSON VAN DREW

Question 1. In your shared testimony, both you and Vice Admiral Allan reference “meeting presence with presence” in the Arctic when it comes to competition with Russia and China. However, it appears that the Service only plans on expanding the Polar Security Cutter (PSC) fleet by 3 and acquiring a handful of others through the Arctic Security Cutter Program.

Do you anticipate this will be enough to face the growing threat of Russia and China in the Arctic?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS TO VICE ADMIRAL THOMAS G. ALLAN, JR., DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR MISSION SUPPORT, U.S. COAST GUARD, FROM HON. JEFFERSON VAN DREW

Question 1. In your testimony, you mention that the Coast Guard needs “significant investment” to modernize and grow capabilities in the Arctic, yet the Service made no funding request for the Polar Security Cutter program in FY 2025.

Question 1.a. What was the reason behind this choice?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 1.b. Is there a plan to make this request for FY 2026?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS TO VICE ADMIRAL PETER W. GAUTIER, DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR OPERATIONS, U.S. COAST GUARD, AND VICE ADMIRAL THOMAS G. ALLAN, JR., DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR MISSION SUPPORT, U.S. COAST GUARD, FROM HON. JAKE AUCHINCLOSS

Question 1. Russia and China have both made significant investments in the Arctic region, while the U.S. has lagged behind on icebreaking capability and arctic presence. China has declared itself a “near-Arctic state” and aims to develop a “Polar Silk Road”—it has invested billions in its Belt and Road initiative in Russia to achieve these goals. The U.S., Canada, and Finland signed the ICE Pact Memorandum of Understanding yesterday, which marks an important first step in reprioritizing icebreakers and U.S. and allied presence in the Arctic.

How is the Coast Guard planning to leverage ICE Pact and make the most of this new agreement to address the lack of resources we have in the Arctic?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. Approximately 80% of the world’s icebreakers are designed by Finnish firms and more than 60% of icebreakers are built in Finnish shipyards. The average Finnish icebreaker would cost about a fifth of the price of a U.S.-built icebreaker and would be completed in about 24 months after a contract is signed.

How is implementation of ICE Pact going to bring costs down for new ship construction for all three countries?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3. The Polar Security Cutter program is plagued by cost increases and delays. The first PSC may not be delivered until 2029 at the earliest. The U.S. is

facing significantly increased competition in the region, including increased Russian and Chinese presence.

Given the operational need for icebreakers, should the U.S. consider simply buying ships directly from our new NATO ally, Finland?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS TO VICE ADMIRAL PETER W. GAUTIER, DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR OPERATIONS, U.S. COAST GUARD, AND VICE ADMIRAL THOMAS G. ALLAN, JR., DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR MISSION SUPPORT, U.S. COAST GUARD, FROM HON. HILLARY J. SCHOLTEN

Question 1. In a June 2021 report to Congress, the Coast Guard provided a construction timeline for an additional heavy Great Lakes icebreaker. This schedule included an Acquisition Decision Event One—which underscores the need for this additional icebreaker—due for completion during the fourth quarter of 2022. We’re now late in 2024 and it’s my understanding that Acquisition Decision Event One has still not been completed and likely won’t until 2025. What is the Coast Guard’s plan to get back on schedule in order to meet the report’s delivery date of 2032?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. I am encouraged to see the United States, Canada, and Finland coming together with the intent to establish an Icebreaker Collaboration Effort, or the ICE Pact, to ensure we’re working with our allies to keep our waters safe and bolster our industrial capacity. The ICE Pact seeks to ramp up the Coast Guard’s icebreaking capabilities and the Biden administration’s announcement of this partnership rightfully points out our need for icebreaker acquisitions for the Arctic. Could you please outline how the inclusion of a heavy Great Lakes icebreaker in the final ICE Pact agreement could boost collaboration with allies, notably Canada, to keep the North American supply chain running during the winter?

ANSWER. A response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTION TO HEATHER MACLEOD, DIRECTOR, HOMELAND SECURITY AND JUSTICE, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, FROM HON. JEFFERSON VAN DREW

Question 1. In your testimony, you state that the Polar Security Cutter program will not be able to produce a lead ship delivery until 2029.

How does this timeline affect the Service’s ability to carry out its core missions in the Arctic?

ANSWER. Continued delays in delivering the Polar Security Cutter increase the likelihood of operational capability gaps in the region which may affect the Coast Guard’s ability to carry out its Arctic missions. Specifically, the Coast Guard anticipates it will have a reduced number of ships available for Arctic operations, jeopardizing its ability to assure continuous presence and reliable access to the Arctic. To mitigate this, the Coast Guard is relying on its two aged existing polar icebreakers and other large vessels capable of operating in the Arctic region. While the icebreakers have generally maintained operations, their continued use increases the risk they will fail before they are replaced. For example, the *Healy* has had two fires on board—in 2020 and 2024 which have forced the vessel to return to Seattle, WA for repairs.

In addition to delays for its Polar Security Cutter, the Coast Guard faces other challenges that can affect its ability to plan for and meet strategic commitments in the Arctic. As we reported in November 2024, these include (1) asset availability challenges, such as the lack of reserve major cutters, and competing demands for these cutters in other areas such as the Indo-Pacific region; (2) limited infrastructure and logistics capabilities in Alaska; (3) cost increases for major acquisition programs such as the Polar Security Cutter; and (4) a significant backlog of shore infrastructure projects that is contributing to affordability concerns for recapitalization and related efforts to sustain existing and planned assets.¹

Over the past decade, we have made numerous recommendations for the Coast Guard and the Department of Homeland Security to change their acquisition approach and align it with leading practices for shipbuilding and acquisition. While

¹ GAO, *Coast Guard: Arctic Risks Assessed, but Information Gaps and Numerous Challenges Threaten Operations*, GAO-25-107910 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 14, 2024).

the Coast Guard has taken some action, it continues to make decisions that imperil its highest priority programs. For example, in September 2018, we found that the Polar Security Cutter's planned delivery dates were not informed by a realistic assessment of shipbuilding activities.² We recommended that the program develop a schedule, in accordance with best practices for project schedules, to set realistic schedule goals for all three Polar Security Cutters before awarding the contract option for construction of the lead ship. However, we closed the recommendation as not implemented because the program proceeded with the award in April 2019 without developing a realistic schedule. As of April 2024, the program had not yet established an updated schedule.³ The program is in the process of updating its schedule estimates to develop a new acquisition program baseline.

We issued a report in December 2024 that discusses the Coast Guard's role and how its current polar icebreakers enable it to operate in the Arctic; how the Coast Guard analyzed its polar icebreaking needs; and the extent to which it has considered options to expand the future fleet.⁴

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²GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisitions: Polar Icebreaker Program Needs to Address Risks before Committing Resources*, GAO-18-600 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 4, 2018).

³GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisitions: Opportunities Exist to Improve Shipbuilding Outcomes*, GAO-24-107488 (Washington, D.C.: May 7, 2024).

⁴GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisitions: Further Cost and Affordability Analysis of Polar Fleet Need*, GAO-25-106822 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 19, 2024).