

IMPORTANCE OF GREAT LAKES ICEBREAKING TO THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

FIELD HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OCEANS, FISHERIES, CLIMATE
CHANGE, AND MANUFACTURING

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE,
SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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IMPORTANCE OF GREAT LAKES ICEBREAKING TO THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 2024

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OCEANS, FISHERIES, CLIMATE
CHANGE AND MANUFACTURING,
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION,
Green Bay, WI.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11 a.m. CST, in Green Bay, Wisconsin 54303, Hon. Tammy Baldwin, Chairman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senator Baldwin [presiding].

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TAMMY BALDWIN, U.S. SENATOR FROM WISCONSIN

Senator BALDWIN. [Technical problems]—icebreaking to Wisconsin and the regional economy. The importance of Great Lakes navigation cannot be overstated. Commerce on the Great Lakes supports more than \$20 billion in regional economic activity, including 147,000 jobs and \$10.5 billion in wages that go directly to hardworking individuals right here in this region.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reports that the Great Lakes save the economy \$3.9 billion per year by providing a less costly way to transport goods. We are in Green Bay to hold this hearing not by accident or happenstance.

Just down the street is the port of Green Bay, which is a vital hub in this navigation system that generates jobs and supports economic activity, so—which is so vital to Wisconsin and to the region.

And I am grateful that today we will be able to hear directly from the people who have firsthand experience moving commodities through our port and keeping this critical part of the regional economy active and healthy.

Our second panel today, we will hear from Dean Haen, the Port Director for the Port of Green Bay; Ken Przybyla, Vice President of Operations for GLC Minerals, a company that has over 150 years of experience moving commodities through the Great Lakes; and Jim Weakley, President of the Lake Carriers Association. Icebreaking during the winter months is crucial to sustaining the movement of good that powers our regional economy.

I recognize that we are having a warmer winter than usual this year, and it is presenting its own challenges for small businesses across the state. Still, three of the worst Great Lakes ice seasons of the past several decades occurred during the past 10 years.

During these 3 years combined, inadequate icebreaking cost our region's economy approximately \$2 billion and 10,000 jobs due to reductions in maritime commerce, resulting in impacts on manufacturing industries. Climate change is contributing to more extreme weather events, larger quantities of precipitation, and higher lake levels.

During the winter, these changes result in greater risk of flooding because ice collects in rivers and forms ice dams. Our communities rely on Coast Guard icebreakers to break up those ice dams and prevent flooding in our communities.

The Coast Guard is the only Federal entity required and equipped to perform icebreaking on U.S. waterways. There are currently nine Great Lakes icebreakers, including just one heavy icebreaker, the Coast Guard Cutter MACKINAW, which has been in service for 17 years.

This vessel is currently the only heavy icebreaking resource assigned to the Great Lakes, conducting 14 percent of the Coast Guard's average annual domestic icebreaking hours. From reliable supply chains to saving lives and property from flooding, we need more icebreakers. And that is why I have consistently advocated for the acquisition of a new, heavy Great Lakes icebreaker.

I was proud to work with my colleagues to introduce the bipartisan Great Lakes Winter Commerce Act, which was signed into law as part of the National Defense Authorization Act in December 2022. This bill authorized full funding for a new heavy Great Lakes icebreaker at \$35 million.

As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee also, I am continuing to work to ensure that we secure funding. In the Senate, we have bipartisan Government funding legislation that includes \$55 million for this new heavy icebreaker.

And I have been, and I will continue to press my colleagues to pass this important funding bill, and I will continue to fight for full funding of the icebreaker and an on-time appropriations bill next year.

Admiral Fagan, and Admiral Hickey, Master Chief Jones, and Master Chief Buckman, thank you all for being here today. I look forward to discussing this region's icebreaking needs with you today, as well as listen—as well as items that are important to our Coast Guard and our Coast Guard families stationed here in the Great Lakes region, such as access to adequate, affordable childcare, housing, and health care.

I am confident that we can work together to better serve those who serve our Nation. And I will now turn over to our witnesses for their opportunity to make opening testimony, starting with Admiral Fagan. We will include your full written testimony in the record.

So, if we could try to keep around 5 minutes, that would be great, and thanks again.

**STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL LINDA L. FAGAN, COMMANDANT,
U.S. COAST GUARD**

Admiral FAGAN. All right. Thank you, Senator. Hopefully, everyone can hear me. And good morning, Chair Baldwin. Thank you for

the opportunity to testify today, the great State of Wisconsin, and I love being in this state.

Thank you as well for your enduring support of the United States Coast Guard and thank you for accepting my written testimony into the record. The Great Lakes are the heart of a regional economy that generates \$6 trillion in gross domestic product every year.

Unimpeded flow of resources on the Great Lakes is essential to preserve the region's prosperity and the Nation's strength. Safeguarding this economy and overcoming the seasonal and environmental challenges of the Great Lakes demands a ready Coast Guard workforce and fleet.

Today, I look forward to sharing how our icebreakers, icebreaking operations, and partnerships are vital for the Coast Guard to sustain readiness, resilience, and capability in the region.

Our workforce is at the forefront of these efforts, and I look forward to discussing the quality of life in Coast Guard service members and their families across the region, including here in Wisconsin.

I am incredibly proud of our Coast Guard active duty, reserve, and civilian, and auxiliary workforce who execute missions across the Great Lakes. And my highest priority as Commandant is to ensure and build our talent management system and strengthen our service culture. Need to ensure that every member is able to serve in a safe environment and is able to serve to their greatest potential.

Every member of our workforce is entitled to serve in an environment free from sexual assault, sexual harassment, hazing, bullying, retaliation, and retribution, and I am committed to the work necessary to ensure our core values of honor and respect are experienced and realized every day by every member of the workforce.

Our Coast Guard families deserve support services that meet their needs. And thank you to Congress, we have made meaningful investments to improve the experience our workforce and families have serving in the Great Lakes region.

Many of our units are in close knit communities where available housing, health care, and childcare differs from densely populated locations. Improved access to health care must include expanding the use of telehealth services, easing access to medical specialties including dental care, physical therapy, and behavioral health services.

We are prioritizing family support, seeking increased access to childcare, and expanding professional development opportunities for Coast Guard spouses. This support helps our workforce meet the challenge of balancing military service and family life. That balance enables our crews to focus on their critical missions to safeguard Great Lakes waterways.

Our goal is to keep the highest priority waterways open for vessels passage during the winter, and we understand that as economic demands and climate conditions change in this region, we must evolve the icebreaking mission accordingly.

Therefore, we are evaluating our current data sources to develop a wider slate of performance measures to assess the health of the waterways, the impacts of commercial icebreaking patterns, and

the performance of our own icebreaking fleet. And we support our Great Lakes shipping partners, and we intend to leverage this information to better articulate our resource needs and tradeoffs within the region.

Along the vast shorelines and shared maritime boundaries of the Great Lakes, our partnerships are vital to the success of the icebreaking mission, and since 1980, the United States Coast Guard has partnered closely with the Canadian Coast Guard to optimize work across the fleet of icebreaking assets.

The partnership, known as One Fleet, facilitates about 1,000 vessel transits carrying 20 million tons of bulk cargo, and supports \$1 billion of industrial production during an average ice season. The United States Coast Guard provides icebreaking capabilities throughout the Great Lakes, with one heavy domestic icebreaker, six 140 foot icebreakers, and two 225 ice capable buoy tenders.

And combined with our Canadian Coast Guard partners, our fleet support a unified approach to icebreaking to provide economies of scale and flexibility. Our continued success in this mission requires the sustainment and modernization of the Coast Guard domestic icebreakers, and I am committed to developing the next system of icebreaking assets.

The recently completed fleet mix analysis result showed we need another heavy domestic icebreaker to meet future mission demands across the Great Lakes. And in consistent with Congressional direction and the President's 2024 budget request, we are focused on acquiring a second heavy domestic icebreaker, and I look forward to continuing to work with Congress to support this acquisition.

The Great Lakes is instrumental to the United States' national security and economic prosperity, and we proudly serve in this region and its communities and are committed to sharpening the services we provide to keep the Great Lakes economy moving forward.

Senator, thank you for the opportunity to be here today, and I look forward to taking your questions. Thank you, Senator.

[The prepared statement of Admiral Fagan follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL LINDA L. FAGAN, COMMANDANT,
U.S. COAST GUARD

Introduction

Chair Baldwin, Ranking Member Sullivan, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify and for your continuing support of the United States Coast Guard. As a premier, multi-mission, maritime service responsible for the safety, security and stewardship of the Nation's waters, the Coast Guard offers a unique and enduring value to the American public. At all times a military service and branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, a Federal law enforcement agency, a first responder, and a regulatory body, the Coast Guard serves on the front lines for a Nation whose economic prosperity and national security are inextricably linked to our waterways, including the Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes region is vital to North American industry, which generates an estimated \$6 trillion in gross domestic product annually. The waterways which support this industry are environmentally dynamic and seasonal in nature, demanding a ready workforce and fleet. Today, Coast Guard icebreaking operations, international partnerships, and efforts to recapitalize our domestic icebreaking fleet are vital for the Service to sustain readiness, resilience, and capability for missions throughout this region.

There are 40 million people, including members of our Coast Guard workforce, who call the Great Lakes basin home. For over 88 years, the Coast Guard has safeguarded the waters of the Great Lakes marine transportation system (MTS). We

proudly serve and protect this region and these communities. In the winter, your Coast Guard breaks the path for prosperity.

At the forefront of Coast Guard Great Lakes icebreaking operations is our workforce. I am incredibly proud of our Coast Guard Active Duty, Reserve, Civilian, and Auxiliary members who perform operations across the Great Lakes and my top priority is to transform the Service to best support them. I look forward to discussing the quality-of-life of Coast Guard Service members and their families serving in locations across the region, including here in Wisconsin.

Mission Critical: Supporting the Workforce

Since I last appeared before Members of this Committee and responded to questions about the handling of investigations of prior sexual misconduct at the Coast Guard Academy, the Service has focused on prevention of sexual harassment and sexual assault; holding members accountable who do not live up to our standards; listening to and supporting victims and survivors; and, strengthening the Service's culture and commitment to our core values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty. From Senior Leaders to the most junior recruit, everyone in our Service must be committed to fostering a culture where each member of our workforce is valued, empowered, trusted, and supported. To my Service, to Congress, to the American public—we continue our important work on this issue. We are unconditionally committed.

My highest priority is the Coast Guard workforce. Without these Sentinels, we cannot operate or maintain our icebreakers, cutters, boats, and aircraft. Thanks to the tremendous support of Congress, we have made meaningful investments to improve the work and life of individuals and families serving across the country. I remain committed in providing the innovative tools, inclusive policies, and quality-of-life support to meet the demands of today and tomorrow. We will continue to use all resources necessary to revolutionize talent management policies and deliver point-of-need healthcare and family services.

We must press forward and continue to develop new strategies for the quality-of-life issues that challenge our workforce and their families. These challenges can be exacerbated in some locations, including idyllic, close-knit communities across this region where the Coast Guard serves. In these locations we are dependent on private sector resources to provide health care services for our workforce. Improved access across the health system must include expanding the use of telehealth services, online appointment scheduling, electronic health records, and bolstering health services such as dental care, physical therapy, and behavioral health services.

We are prioritizing family support, focused on increasing access to childcare, expanding professional development opportunities, and assisting spouses desiring to participate in fellowships with civilian employers. We offer expanded Work-Life services to families through our global network of ombudsmen—who serve as the critical communications link between commands and families. This support allows the Coast Guard's active duty workforce to overcome the challenge of balancing military service and their family life. I want to emphasize my commitment to the entirety of 'Team Coast Guard.' Our families are essential to mission success—success which is critical to safeguarding the waterways of the Great Lakes.

Advancing the Mission, Sharpening Our Standards

The foundation of commerce in the Great Lakes is the movement of quantities of commodities and agricultural goods such as iron, coal, petroleum products, and salt. Since the most cost-effective mode of transportation for these raw materials is by vessel, the continuous and unimpeded flow of these resources upon the navigable waters of the MTS is essential to preserve the region's—and Nation's—economic and national prosperity. The seasonality of the Great Lakes, including its propensity to experience ice-choked conditions, can challenge this nationally significant supply chain.

The Service conducts domestic icebreaking operations throughout the Great Lakes to facilitate this critical maritime commerce. Our domestic icebreaking operations generally fall into one of four priorities: search and rescue, urgent response to vessels, exigent community services, and facilitation of navigation.

Conducting search and rescue and urgent response to vessels is at the core of the Service, and our icebreaker fleet ensures we continue to help those in peril through the winter ice season. We provide icebreaking services to open channels for ferry routes and ice-bound Michigan communities such as Mackinac Island, Beaver Island, Sugar Island, Harsens Island, and Washington Island to ensure these communities can receive food, heating oil, fuel, and medical assistance. We also work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to aid in the prevention of floods and hazardous

water levels near shoreline communities that may be caused by ice obstructions, such as flooding events in recent years near the St. Clair River.

As originally established by President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 7521 in 1936, and further codified by the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 (CGAA), the Coast Guard facilitates navigation by breaking ice to meet the needs of commerce. Icebreaking operations include the establishment and maintenance of tracks in the connecting waterways of the MTS, as well as providing escorts and direct assistance to vessels beset in ice or requiring aid.

The Coast Guard monitors the amount of time the highest priority waterways are available for vessel passage during the winter. Our goal is to keep these waterways open 95 percent of the season and we generally achieve this in all but the harshest conditions. As both economic demands and climate conditions change, we look to evolve this mission.

The Coast Guard is evaluating current data sources to develop a broader slate of performance measures. Proposed measures will expand beyond the current target (*i.e.*, keeping the highest priority waterways open 95 percent of the ice season) to encompass the health of the waterway, impacts of commercial icebreaking partners, and performance of the icebreaking fleet.

In addition, a public-facing database will be established to share data about this mission. While the most recent and current ice seasons have not afforded many opportunities to collect mission data, we are working with Great Lakes shipping partners to continue these efforts. We have already established preliminary weekly reporting on commercial vessel delays caused by inadequate icebreaking on our public-facing *Homeport* website.

The Power of Partnerships

Establishing and sustaining partnerships is key to success for the Coast Guard’s domestic icebreaking mission. The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway form a continuous navigable waterway bordering the United States and Canada, spanning more than 2,300 miles from the western end of Lake Superior to the Atlantic Ocean. Recognizing the Great Lakes is a shared waterway, the Coast Guard partners closely with the Canadian Coast Guard to optimize efficiencies across the fleet of icebreaking assets in the Great Lakes. Since 1980, the two Coast Guards have maintained an agreement—known as *One Fleet*—which allows both United States and Canadian Coast Guard icebreakers to operate interchangeably on both sides of the international border.

This shared system of waterways is vital to the prosperity of both nations. During an average 145-day ice season, the icebreakers of the United States and Canada facilitate about 1,000 vessel transits, carrying 20 million tons of bulk cargo annually and supporting \$1 billion in industrial production. The Coast Guard also relies upon the Great Lakes’ numerous commercial icebreaking companies to conduct icebreaking within internal waterways and alongside private docks and harbors. These services free our more-capable icebreakers to focus on major waterways.

Workhorses of Great Lakes Icebreaking—Investing in the Fleet

The Coast Guard provides icebreaking capabilities throughout the Great Lakes with one heavy domestic icebreaker, six 140-foot icebreakers, and two 225-foot ice-capable buoy tenders. 140-foot icebreakers stationed on the Great Lakes are the workhorses of the icebreaking fleet. They can reliably break flat ice up to 36-inches thick and back-and-ram through 9-foot ridges, while still being nimble enough to maneuver within the restricted confines of smaller waterways such as the St. Mary’s River and St. Clair River.

The Coast Guard’s newest domestic icebreaker, Coast Guard Cutter (CGC) *Mackinaw* is the only heavy domestic icebreaker in the fleet. CGC *Mackinaw* is used to break ice in the most challenging conditions, with plate ice often exceeding 42-inches, and ridges greater than 9-feet thick. CGC *Mackinaw*’s unique azimuth pod propulsion system provides a combination of power and maneuverability that allows for vital evolutions, such as freeing a beset 1,000-foot long “laker” in the St. Mary’s River.

This integrated system of icebreaking capabilities also includes two ice-capable 225-foot buoy tenders. While not designed to serve as dedicated icebreakers, these cutters can provide limited icebreaking services in ice up to 14-inches thick and have proven to be well-suited to escort commercial vessels in unrestricted areas such as the Straits of Mackinac. Combined with the assets of our Canadian Coast Guard and commercial icebreaking partners, this fleet delivers a unified approach to icebreaking that provides economies of scale and the flexibility to address evolving mission needs in dynamic environmental conditions.

The Coast Guard recently completed a Fleet Mix Analysis which recommended a future fleet of in-kind capacity to replace this current fleet. The results showed a need for another heavy domestic icebreaker to meet future service needs across the Great Lakes. The ability to achieve continued success in this mission and reliably facilitate navigation within the MTS year-round requires sustainment and modernization of the Coast Guard's domestic icebreaking fleet, and I am committed to developing the next system of icebreaking assets.

Consistent with Congressional direction, we are focused on acquiring a second heavy domestic icebreaker, at least as capable as CGC *Mackinaw*. We established a Great Lakes Icebreaking Program Management Office to analyze requirements for the next generation of domestic icebreaking capability and have completed pre-acquisition activities, readying the Service to advance upon receipt of an appropriation. The FY 2024 President's Budget requests \$55 million to fund initial acquisition activities and prepare for the purchase of long lead time materials for a second heavy domestic icebreaker. I look forward to continuing to work with Congress to support this acquisition.

Conclusion

The Great Lakes MTS is instrumental to economic and national security. Iced-in conditions increase the possibility of supply-chain disruptions and delays, which can result in impacts to the economy and increased costs to consumers. The Coast Guard's Great Lakes icebreaking fleet is essential to provide access and mobility as industry works efficiently and effectively to move pivotal cargoes of iron ore, limestone, coal, and cement during shortened shipping seasons. We are steadfastly committed to sharpening the services we provide.

The Coast Guard is the only military Service outside the Department of Defense and the only Armed Force that is primarily funded via non-defense appropriations. Not funding the Coast Guard at the levels requested in our budget jeopardizes the long-term readiness of the Service, putting American lives, national security, and the U.S. MTS at risk. I ask for your support to ensure the Coast Guard—like every U.S. Armed Force—has the resources necessary to safeguard the Nation.

With the support of the Administration and Congress, your Coast Guard will continue to live up to our motto—Semper Paratus—Always Ready. Thank you for your enduring support.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. And next, Master Chief Jones.

STATEMENT OF MASTER CHIEF HEATH B. JONES, MASTER PETTY CHIEF, U.S. COAST GUARD

Mr. JONES. Good morning, Chair Baldwin. Thank you for accepting my written testimony into the record.

I want to express, alongside Admiral Fagan, our appreciation for your unwavering support for our Coast Guard members, not only here in the Ninth District, with everywhere your Coast Guard serves our country. Every day, our citizens put themselves at risk to protect, to defend, and to save.

I want to echo the Commandant and clearly state to this committee and to our workforce that we are committed to building our talent management system and strengthening our service culture.

As we discuss the future of the Coast Guard, my primary focus is our Sentinels and their families, specifically increasing access to physical and behavioral health care, childcare, and to affordable housing.

Access to quality health care is one of the critical issues affecting Coast Guard families, who often struggle to find local doctors in the Tricare system. To mitigate this challenge, the service is working to expand telehealth capabilities and to provide medical care to members in remote locations.

In 2023, the service released the Coast Guard's Behavioral Health Playbook, and this is going to help our members respond

sensitively, professionally, and respectfully to behavioral health concerns.

The Coast Guard is committing to adding clinical resources and increasing the number of full time, permanently staff positions to meet these readiness demands. Our workforce and their families are integral to every community in which they live and serve. Taking care of our Coast Guard families is vital to retaining the best talent our Nation has to offer.

Here in the Ninth District and other areas with limited access to child development centers, childcare subsidies help reduce financial burdens, significantly lower stress, and improve the quality of life for our Coast Guard families.

Thank you for your continued support of childcare subsidies to ensure that our workforce and their families are supported and able to serve their communities. They are making a difference every single day. Over 40 percent of Coast Guard units are in small coastal communities or areas with the high percentage of vacation rentals, many located here in the Ninth District.

With these—while these idyllic, close knit but often high cost communities support the Coast Guard and their families very well, many members do struggle to find affordable housing. In places like Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, the service provides Coast Guard owned housing for members with dependents, while continuing to participate in processes that determine how basic allowance for housing is calculated.

I am inspired every single day by the service's focus on improving the quality of life for our Coast Guard families here in the Ninth District and across our Nation. Admiral Fagan and I are committed to fostering a culture where our members feel trusted, valued, empowered, and included.

The Coast Guard will need Congressional assistance to ensure we continue to improve. I am humbled to have the privilege to serve with and represent our Sentinels here today, and I am grateful for your support. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Jones follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MASTER CHIEF HEATH B. JONES,
MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER, U.S. COAST GUARD

Introduction

Chair Baldwin, Ranking Member Sullivan, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and echo the Commandant's appreciation for your enduring support of the United States Coast Guard. I would like to personally thank each of you for your unwavering support of our workforce here in the Great Lakes and everywhere your Coast Guard serves. Throughout my career, I have been fortunate to serve alongside members of the most capable and dedicated workforce in the U.S. Government, and I am thankful for the privilege to discuss their needs with you today.

As America's maritime first responder, the Coast Guard is woven into communities across the Great Lakes, along the Pacific, Atlantic, Arctic, and Gulf Coasts, and throughout our inland rivers. I am proud of the ways we contribute to national security and prosperity: we rescue mariners in distress, protect vital marine natural resources, break ice to facilitate commerce, inspect ships to verify safety and pollution controls, deliver aid after disasters, mark navigable waterways to keep mariners safe from hazards, secure our ports and harbors, and interdict illegal drugs far from our shores. Across these Lakes, in the ports, on the seas, throughout cyberspace, and around the globe, we are the world's premier maritime Service, posi-

tioned to protect, defend, and save. I am extremely proud of our Coast Guard Active Duty, Reserve, Civilian, and Auxiliary workforce and humbled to serve as their Senior Enlisted Leader. The Coast Guard workforce delivers when called upon.

Workforce

The Coast Guard workforce is the heart and soul of our organization, and their dedication and sacrifices keep our Nation safe and secure. These Sentinels have the right to a safe workplace, free from harassment, bullying, retaliation, and assault. They deserve nothing less, and the Coast Guard leadership team is committed to strengthening our Service culture to achieve this end.

Every day, the Coast Guard workforce in the Ninth District puts themselves at risk to protect our natural resources, defend our maritime transportation system, and save lives. For those who serve here and everywhere I am committed to modernizing our talent management system so that we can best recruit and retain Sentinels in the 21st century. The Coast Guard workforce must reflect the American public we serve and requires the tools, policy, training, and support to succeed across all our mission areas. As we expand our reach and capabilities, we are committed to enhancing support structures to ensure the well-being and effectiveness of our workforce.

Those joining our Service today have new expectations, and we are taking this to heart as we adjust how we recruit, train, and retain them and their families. We must expand access to high-quality physical and mental healthcare, childcare, and affordable housing especially for units in idyllic, close-knit, but often high cost, communities. We continue to revisit policies that prevent otherwise qualified applicants from beginning their careers, and we are implementing policy changes designed to retain the best our Nation has to offer. Similarly, we are pursuing new training designs focused on meaningful learning, both in classrooms and in the field. I am committed to pursuing this necessary, transformational work.

Infrastructure

Investing in the workforce means providing modern working, living and training facilities. Coast Guard facilities must be functional and resilient enough to meet both daily and emergent mission demands. The Nation's reliance on the Coast Guard as a first responder after natural disasters underscores the importance of resilient facilities to all our operations. Based on the nature of our missions, Coast Guard facilities are in areas prone to hurricanes, flooding, earthquakes, deadly wildfires, and other natural disasters. Your support for a stable, predictable budget and continued investments in modernizing facilities and infrastructure are crucial for our mission readiness, effectiveness, and success.

Housing is a concern for our Sentinels and their families. All servicemembers and their dependents deserve access to safe, quality, and affordable housing within a reasonable commute of their workplace. Unlike the other Armed Services whose workforce is often centralized around large military bases, many Coast Guard personnel are stationed in small communities across the country. Forty percent of Coast Guard units are in small coastal communities or areas with a high percentage of vacation rentals. Many of those units are located right here in the Ninth District. While these amazing communities are supportive of their Coast Guard, many members struggle to find affordable and available housing in the areas where they serve. We monitor locations that are often impacted by short-term rental markets and are working to provide additional housing options and resources to members here in the Ninth District and across the Service. In locations such as Sault St. Marie, Michigan; Neah Bay, Washington; and Jonesport, Maine, the Service provides Coast Guard-owned family-type housing for members with dependents to supplement rentals in the communities.

We are currently exploring ten Department of Defense (DoD) housing authorities that could potentially benefit the Service and our families and we continue to participate in processes that contribute to how Basic Allowance for Housing is calculated. I look forward to the results of the 14th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation and the recommended changes to Basic Pay and housing allowances to better support our Sentinels and their families in these areas.

A modernized approach to project planning, prioritizing, and execution coupled with additional investments is necessary to ensure the Service has the facilities we need to meet the operational demands of a recapitalized fleet. We must proceed with diligence, as this work will provide the future facilities to meet the needs of Sentinels for generations to come.

Healthcare

Healthcare is a pillar of the Armed Services quality-of-life benefit system. When I visit cutter and shore commands, I hear the same concerns from our Sentinels and

families about timely access to healthcare in close proximity to where they live and work. Acceptable, consistent, available, and timely healthcare for our service members is the minimum standard. Access to quality healthcare, mental and physical, is one of the most important issues affecting Coast Guard families today. The Coast Guard is unique among the Armed Services in that our mission set often dictates that a very high percentage of our workforce is geographically dispersed, sometimes at very small commands like our units along Great Lakes coastlines.

Coast Guard families often find themselves spending days to identify and access healthcare providers within Tricare's network to obtain specialty care when there is a shortage of local doctors and practitioners participating in the system. To mitigate this challenge, the Service is leveraging and expanding telehealth capabilities to provide medical care to members in remote locations. However, additional support is critical to meet the needs of our Coast Guard families. The Coast Guard needs the support of local health institutions and practitioners, and community leaders, to address these critical support services in remote locations.

In FY 2023, the Service released the Coast Guard Behavioral Health Playbook, which provides supervisors and command leadership with tools, guidance, and tips to respond sensitively, professionally, and respectfully to behavioral health concerns. The Service is committed to supporting clinical resources and full-time, permanently staffed positions to meet deployment and readiness demands. We must ensure members have timely access to high quality health care.

Childcare

Access to childcare is a significant concern of our workforce and impacts our ability to recruit and retain. This is not just a Coast Guard or military issue, and shortages have a direct impact on the readiness of our units. High childcare costs impact our workforce across the Nation, particularly here in the Ninth District and other areas without the large bases that allow access to DoD or Coast Guard Child Development Centers. We have found that in some areas, childcare subsidies can minimize financial burdens, increase accessible options, reduce significant stressors, and improve the quality of life for our Coast Guard families. Your continuing support of these subsidies is vital to ensuring our workforce and their families are supported and able to continue to meet the Coast Guard's mission.

Conclusion

I am inspired by the Service's focus on improving the quality of life for our Coast Guard families here in the Ninth District and across the Service. Change in Coast Guard policy can only move the needle so far for our workforce. The Service appreciates the continued support of Congressional assistance to ensure we can continue to make improvements. I am humbled to have the privilege to serve with and represent our Sentinels and am grateful for your support.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. Next we have Admiral Hickey.

STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL JONATHAN P. HICKEY, COMMANDER, NINTH DISTRICT, U.S. COAST GUARD

Admiral HICKEY. Good morning, Chair Baldwin. I am honored to be here today to represent our workforce of your Coast Guard's Ninth District and discuss Coast Guard operations on the Great Lakes and their importance to our economic prosperity and our national security.

Thank you for accepting my testimony and my written testimony into the record. The Ninth District is responsible for a vast area of operations, covering 94,000 mi² with coastline spanning the distance equivalent to the Atlantic coastline from Maine to Florida.

Nearly 2,500 active duty, civilian, and reserve personnel, alongside 2,000 Coast Guard auxiliaries, operate from 73 Coast Guard units, including 10 Coast Guard cutters across the Great Lakes to facilitate this region's safe, secure, and robust marine transportation system. The Ninth District's fleet of cutters is central to our mission success.

Annually, nine cutters participate in icebreaking to keep commerce moving through the winter months. Although these cutters focus on icebreaking in the winter, they are employed year round.

On an annual basis, they provide nearly 18,000 hours of service to the Great Lakes across all mission sets, including aids to navigation, search and rescue, participating in interagency drills and exercises, supporting major marine events, and providing law enforcement support to significant events such as the national conventions being held this summer in Michigan—I am sorry, in Milwaukee and Chicago.

The cutters can be stressed in winter months, particularly when a casualty occurs because timeliness matters when you are breaking ice. Delays in freeing a commercial ship beset by ice or providing flood control to coastal communities can have catastrophic consequences.

We absolutely must provide the proper level of service at the right time. Any unscheduled maintenance or long lead times for parts puts strain on our crews to find ways to perform their assigned missions. Sustaining this fleet is critical to meeting mission demands today and into the future.

As the operational commander for the Great Lakes, I strongly support the service's pursuit of another heavy domestic icebreaker to meet our mission needs across the Great Lakes. Our crews who operate and sustain this fleet and the total workforce here in the Ninth District are essential to mission success.

The uniqueness of the Great Lakes and where our units are located creates challenges to obtain timely medical care, including dental, mental, and behavioral health, often requiring long appointment wait times and significant travel times.

Additionally, since many of our stations and cutters are located along the Great Lakes shoreline and highly popular recreational destinations, access to adequate and affordable housing within a reasonable commute to work is a stressor for many of our members. These challenges can impact individual and operational readiness, family well-being, and retention.

In January 2024, the Ninth District released the first ever Great Lakes Maritime Strategy Action Plan, which will focus our efforts on our highest priorities over the next 12 to 24 months. A key part of this plan is to bolster the readiness and resiliency of our workforce, including actions to strengthen our service culture and to improve access to health care, childcare, and affordable housing for our members and their families.

Like the Commandant and MCPOCG said, I am also so proud of our Coast Guard workforce in the Ninth District. They are devoted every single day to ensuring and safeguarding the Great Lakes Marine transportation system, ensuring the safety of those who rely on the lakes for their livelihoods and recreation, and delivering Coast Guard services and new ways to meet future challenges.

I would like to close by thanking the Committee for your continued support. It is absolutely essential to our continued success. Thank you, Senator, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Admiral Hickey follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL JONATHAN P. HICKEY, COMMANDER,
NINTH DISTRICT, U.S. COAST GUARD

Introduction

Chair Baldwin, Ranking Member Sullivan, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify and for your continuing support of the United States Coast Guard. As the Ninth District Commander, I am excited to discuss Great Lakes operations including domestic icebreaking, and to highlight examples of our recent successes and our ongoing efforts to advance mission excellence. The Sentinels of the Ninth District are committed to overcoming challenges so that we can continue to assure mission execution across the economic, strategic, and culturally significant maritime environment throughout the Great Lakes.

The Ninth District is responsible for a vast area of operations, covering 94,000 square miles with coastlines spanning a distance equivalent to the Atlantic coastline from Maine to Florida. This immense footprint requires a talented and dispersed workforce to provide the services needed to facilitate this region's safe, secure, and robust Marine Transportation System (MTS). Nearly 2,500 Active Duty, Civilian, and Reserve personnel and 2,000 Coast Guard Auxiliarists operate from four Sectors, two Air Stations, 44 Small Boat Stations, four Marine Safety Units, two Marine Safety Detachments, seven Aids to Navigation Teams, and nine Coast Guard Cutters to carry out critical Coast Guard missions across the Great Lakes.

Ninth District Operations

The seasonality of the Great Lakes impacts the operations and services provided to this region's mariners, industry, and waterways users. The environmental shift between "soft and hard water" seasons can be severe and is somewhat unique to this Coast Guard District, requiring tailored operations and specialized expertise for those who serve here. In Fiscal Year 2023, the Ninth District responded to 2,004 Search and Rescue (SAR) cases, the second largest number of SAR cases among all Coast Guard Districts, assisting 2,457 persons, and saving 805 lives.

It is worth noting that while most of these rescues occurred in the 100 days between Memorial Day and Labor Day, these figures also include search and rescue on ice covered waterways in the winter months. The Ninth District is purposefully trained for ice rescue and while overall SAR responses are fewer in the winter, each response is urgent and oftentimes more dangerous.

The Aids to Navigation mission is also affected by seasonality, as the Ninth District removes and replaces 1,210 summer aids with more resilient ice aids in the fall to withstand Great Lakes ice coverage. In the spring, this process is reversed, restoring the Aids to Navigation constellation to best mark waterways for both commercial and recreational mariners. Last year, Ninth District units also conducted more than 7,000 vessel inspections and investigations and responded to 401 Marine Environmental Response (pollution response) cases to protect the Great Lakes' sensitive environment and support the region's MTS.

The importance of the Ninth District's fleet of cutters is paramount to achieving success across this unique maritime domain. Annually, nine cutters participate in the largest domestic icebreaking mission, keeping commerce moving throughout the winter months. Although these cutters are focused on ice breaking in the winter, they are employed year-around. In fact, on an annual basis, they provide nearly 18,000 hours of service to the Great Lakes across all mission sets, including Icebreaking, Aids to Navigation, Search and Rescue, participating in interagency drills and exercises, supporting major marine events (*e.g.*, substantial marine regattas), and providing law enforcement support to significant events (*e.g.*, this year's National Football League Draft in Detroit and the Republican and Democratic National Conventions being held in Milwaukee and Chicago this coming summer).

Cutter Readiness

Cutters and crews do an exceptional job covering this expanse of operations while facing challenges to meet the mission. Our system of approach provides icebreaking capabilities throughout the Great Lakes with one heavy domestic icebreaker, six 140-foot icebreakers and two 225-foot ice-capable buoy tenders. The cutters are workhorses and essential to icebreaking operations; however, this system can be stressed in winter months when a casualty to our cutters places an increased strain on the others and impacts capacity to meet mission demands. Timeliness matters when breaking ice, as freeing a commercial ship beset by ice or providing flood control to coastal communities can have catastrophic consequences if we cannot provide the level of service and response time required.

Coast Guard Cutter (CGC) *Mackinaw*, our sole domestic heavy icebreaker is a key capability, essential to our icebreaking mission, providing the strength needed to op-

erate in the most challenging ice conditions and vital to supporting the Great Lakes commercial fleet. That said, unscheduled maintenance can sideline this capability. A second Great Lakes icebreaker, as proposed in the President's 2024 budget, will provide much needed redundancy and capacity.

Any unscheduled maintenance due to system failures or long-lead times to replace failed parts puts a strain on our crews to find ways to provide for waterway availability, support SAR operations, and perform other missions. Sustaining this fleet is critical to meeting mission demands and providing adequate capability and capacity for the future.

Great Lakes Maritime Strategy Action Plan

As highlighted in past hearings on the Coast Guard's workforce, the Service faces personnel readiness challenges as a result of personnel shortages. Here in the Great Lakes, this is requiring more than 600 days of temporary duty surge staffing support to safely and effectively operate our fleet of icebreakers. We continue to be resilient and meet the needs of commerce and the public due to our dedicated workforce which is committed to getting the mission done. This team is clearly our greatest asset. We recognize this, which is why we are also prioritizing support for our workforce.

The uniqueness of the Great Lakes and areas where our units are located create challenges to obtaining timely medical care, including dental, mental, and behavioral health, often requiring long waits and significant travel to access needed services. Additionally, access to affordable housing within a reasonable commute to work is a stressor for many of our members who may struggle to find a home where their families can thrive in the dynamic markets of these idyllic, close-knit communities. These challenges can impact individual and operational readiness, family well-being, and retention. In January 2024, the Ninth District released the first-ever Great Lakes Maritime Strategy Action Plan, which is meant to focus our efforts on our highest priorities over the next 12 to 24 months. A key part of this Plan aims to bolster the readiness and resilience of our workforce, including actions to strengthen our Service culture and improve access to health care and affordable housing for our members and their families.

The Action Plan will guide the Ninth District to deliver the Coast Guard's vital services in new ways by focusing our efforts to ensure preparedness for emerging threats; further strengthen partner cooperation and stakeholder relationships; maintain the safe, secure, and efficient use of the Great Lakes MTS; protect the cyberspace of the Great Lakes MTS; optimize mission readiness and execution; and improve Coast Guard facilities.

Ninth District Success

Through the amazing work of those who serve in the Ninth District, operational success has been achieved and mission requirements have been met while remaining always ready to serve across the Great Lakes, including right here in Wisconsin. For example, recently our team executed two ice rescue cases on the same day, February 8, 2024. First, Coast Guard Station Sturgeon Bay and Air Station Traverse City supported the rescue of three people from an ice floe off Benderville, WI, with the New Franken Fire Department. Shortly after the rescue of those three lives, Station Sturgeon Bay and Air Station Traverse City responded to four individuals stranded on another ice floe off Bay Shore Park, WI. Station Sturgeon Bay successfully saved the stranded individuals with the support of first responders from Brown County. Additionally, in January 2024, Coast Guard Cutter *Mobile Bay*, homeported in Sturgeon Bay, broke a critical path through ice choked waters off Green Bay, ensuring three critical home heating oil deliveries totaling 10.5 million gallons made it to households in need.

Recognizing the inherent risk that accompanies the intense winter maintenance required to sustain the domestic commercial vessel fleet which operates in this region, the Ninth District Coast Guard operational commanders established a workgroup with key agencies to develop procedures to mitigate hazards that may arise in this compressed maintenance period.

This workgroup—the Great Lakes Marine Firefighting Task Force—combines federal, state, local, and industry expertise to prevent and effectively respond to major marine fires in ports like Sturgeon Bay, where much of this work is done. Looking ahead, Coast Guard Sector Lake Michigan has a significant role in the planning for the protection of the 2024 Republican National Convention being held in Milwaukee this July and the Democratic National Convention in Chicago this August. Sector personnel and assets will support the interagency team across the convention events and will lead security for events with proximity to the waterfront.

Conclusion

The Coast Guard's Ninth District workforce is devoted every day to safeguarding the Great Lakes MTS. They are also devoted to the safety of those who rely on these waters for their livelihoods and recreation, and to delivering Coast Guard services in new ways to meet future challenges.

This team is getting the job done with the current operational fleet and existing facilities. The continued support of Congress to sustain our capabilities and provide healthcare, housing, and childcare services for our members and their families is critical to the long-term success of the Coast Guard's Ninth District.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. Next we have Master Chief Buckman.

STATEMENT OF MASTER CHIEF MATTHEW D. BUCKMAN, COMMAND MASTER CHIEF, NINTH DISTRICT, U.S. COAST GUARD

Mr. BUCKMAN. Senator, good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today representing the men and women of the Ninth Coast Guard District and thank you for accepting my written comment into the record.

The Coast Guard is committed to optimizing support for our Sentinels and their families across the Ninth District. Our workforce is concerned about securing quality housing, physical and behavioral health care, and childcare, and we are focused on addressing these concerns. The seasonality of many areas where we operate significantly impact housing availability and affordability for our members.

Many of our members rely on basic allowance for housing or BAH, which may not cover the full cost of housing. We have worked with local partners to lease and manage housing units where possible, but in communities where leases are unavailable, the difference between VA rates and market prices can leave families in a difficult position.

We have initiated a Housing Action Plan as part of our Great Lakes Maritime Strategy Action Plan, and our goal is to ensure that every Coast Guard family has adequate and affordable housing, supporting their well-being and ability to serve. Investments in infrastructure are vital for enhancing the Coast Guard's operational performance, member satisfaction, unit pride, and retention.

We are recapitalizing our Milwaukee facility and are nearly complete with the modernization of the Green Bay small boat station, which will provide a robust location for targeted operations. We are grateful for these investments and look forward to an additional \$65 million, which is planned over the next 5 years.

I echo Master Chief Jones's comments on access to quality behavioral and physical health care for our members. Timely health care near where our members live, and work is a concern expressed during unit visits. Many locations have limited health care options and require long commutes.

This affects medical readiness for our Sentinels and their families. Childcare challenges can have a direct impact on the readiness of our Sentinels. Typically, members must secure care, utilize, and establish subsidy programs to help offset the cost. Without these subsidy programs, childcare can be prohibitively expensive for families.

Your continuing support of these subsidies is essential to safeguarding the readiness of our workforce and their families. The district senior leadership is dedicated itself to providing our workforce and families the personal and professional resources to thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and for all you do for the Coast Guard, included in the Ninth District's workforce. Their commitment to the mission is why the U.S. Coast Guard is world's best. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Buckman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MASTER CHIEF MATTHEW D. BUCKMAN,
COMMAND MASTER CHIEF, NINTH DISTRICT, U.S. COAST GUARD

Introduction

Chair Baldwin, Ranking Member Sullivan, and distinguished subcommittee members. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today representing the Ninth District workforce to express our appreciation of your support for the United States Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard's commitment in the Ninth District is to provide and optimize support to our members and their families. We recognize that work is necessary to achieve the quality of life they deserve. Personnel support challenges in the region are similar to those impacting members throughout the Service. Sufficient Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) to secure a home where our families can thrive, timely access to physical and behavioral healthcare, and access to childcare are the primary concerns of the Ninth District's workforce. Our recently published Great Lakes Maritime Strategy and Action Plan will focus our efforts on providing the best individual services and workplaces for our members.

Housing

Securing adequate housing is a significant concern for Coast Guard members, particularly in the Ninth District. Many of our units are in seasonal tourist destinations and areas with limited housing. Both factors significantly impact housing availability and affordability for our members. Given the limitations of Coast Guard-owned housing, our members often rely on BAH entitlements, which may not fully cover the cost of housing in these high-demand and remote areas. We have worked with local partners to lease and manage housing units where possible. In areas where leases are unavailable, the difference between BAH rates and market prices leave some members in a difficult position, as seen in places like Sturgeon Bay and Bayfield, WI.

Recognizing these challenges, we have initiated a comprehensive Housing Action Plan as part of our Great Lakes Maritime Strategy. This plan, under the direction of Rear Admiral Hickey, aims to provide the best possible input to the BAH calculation process and expand the availability of leased housing. Our goal in the Ninth District is to ensure that every member has access to adequate and affordable housing, supporting their well-being and ability to serve. This initiative represents a critical step forward in addressing the unique housing needs of our service members, reinforcing our commitment to their quality of life and operational readiness.

Infrastructure

Investments in infrastructure are vital for enhancing the Coast Guard's operational performance, member satisfaction, pride, and retention rates. Over Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023, the Coast Guard invested \$17 million in projects that addressed emergent repairs and quality of life necessities here in the Ninth District. With an additional planned investment of \$65 million over the next five years, the Ninth District will still carry a substantial backlog.

Significant infrastructure challenges exist at the 18 boat stations constructed before 1970, with five boat stations over 100 years old. One of those units, Station Sturgeon Bay, was built in 1896 for the U.S. Lifesaving Service. Despite updates to the building over the last 128 years, its size restricts the comfort and operational capacity for personnel.

Our Strategic Action Plan in the Ninth District focuses on infrastructure investments to enhance our members' mission readiness and the quality of life. Following feedback from our station Officers in Charge, the Ninth District has allocated funding to install boat maintenance sheds at 10 stations, addressing winter protection needs for our response boats—a measure expected to improve mission readiness and crew comfort significantly. In Wisconsin, our focus is on recapitalizing Sector Lake

Michigan's facility in Milwaukee to address space and utility shortcomings. Additionally, modernization of the Green Bay Station is nearly complete. The modernization will provide a robust location for targeted operations, signaling a step forward in operational capacity and resilience for the upcoming boating season.

Healthcare and Childcare

Timely healthcare near where our members live and work is a concern commonly expressed during unit visits. Many locations in the region have limited healthcare options and require long commutes to obtain care. This challenge affects medical readiness for our members as well as their families. To address medical readiness, we have leveraged a contract with Quality Timeliness Customer Service Medical Services to organize focused geographic readiness events to complete annual health assessments and provide limited dental care. While this allows us to better assess the health readiness of our members, more work is needed to address long-term care and care for dependents. Mental health providers are also in high demand everywhere, including many communities where our members are assigned. Undertreated mental wellness can have crippling effects on members that may, in turn, impact operational readiness and families. Mental telehealth services such as Telemynd and CGSUPRT service have increased access, and I thank you for the support provided to care for Coast Guard families. I echo Master Chief Jones' request for community and provider support to achieve the quality physical and mental care our Coast Guard families deserve.

Childcare challenges have a direct impact on the readiness of Ninth District units. Typically, members must secure individual care utilizing the established subsidy program to help offset the cost. Were it not for this subsidy program, quality childcare can be prohibitively expensive and unattainable for our members. Your continuing support of these subsidies is essential to safeguarding the readiness of our workforce and their families.

Conclusion

The Ninth District's senior leadership dedicates itself to providing our members the personal and professional resources to thrive and provide the best service to the Great Lakes and Nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and for all you do for the Coast Guard, including the Ninth District's workforce. Our Sentinels are committed to the mission, are impressively talented, and are why the U.S. Coast Guard is the world's best.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. Thank you all for your opening statements. As we all know, the primary purpose of this hearing is to discuss the economic importance of icebreaking on the Great Lakes.

But before I turn to that topic, I must acknowledge that we still have much work to be done to achieve accountability for survivors of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the Coast Guard. The Commandant proactively raised this urgent issue in her opening statement.

Since July, I have been pursuing accountability within the Coast Guard and the Department of Homeland Security regarding the disturbing revelations that Coast Guard leaders withheld important information from Congress, both during and after the conclusion of an investigation known as Operation Fouled Anchor, which concerned the Coast Guard Academy.

Disturbingly, we continue to hear accounts of Coast Guard leaders failing to take appropriate action to support survivors and hold perpetrators of sexual violence and misconduct accountable.

Two weeks ago, as documents are coming out, we learned another alarming revelation, and that was that senior Coast Guard leaders made an intentional decision to withhold important information from Congress.

In fact, there was even a drafted list of the pros and cons of briefing Congress on the Coast Guard's internal investigation of

sexual assault cases at the Academy. Leaders at the highest levels of the Coast Guard made the deliberate decision to withhold the existence of Operation Fouled Anchor from the Committee, from the public, and from survivors.

This is unacceptable and I am appalled by this damaging, unethical, and potentially criminal behavior. Admiral Fagan, can you confirm that you do not tolerate this type of behavior within your command, and that you and members of your staff do not select items of information to deliberately withhold from Congress?

Admiral FAGAN. Thank you, Senator. I can 100 percent affirm that I am fully committed to transparency and understand the criticality of the oversight role of the Senate and Congress. We have been responsive to the request for information. I am committed to supporting and being responsive to the IG investigation that is ongoing.

And as we continue to provide information and ensure, again, that the appropriate oversight role is being fulfilled, I am 100 percent focused on moving the organization forward so that we are a better organization on the other side of this, and that we are in a position to not fail victims and ensure that we continue to improve and live to the values that we ascribe to and value, and that every day everyone experiences a service culture that is consistent with honor and respect.

And I am committed to the oversight process and the IG report. Thank you, Senator.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. And at our hearing in July, you stated your commitment to transparency and achieving that full accountability. Will you reaffirm that commitment?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes, I affirm that commitment to transparency and accountability.

Senator BALDWIN. All right. Thank you. Master Chief Jones, I am similarly concerned that what we have learned about the pervasive pattern of the Coast Guard failing to hold perpetrators of sexual misconduct accountable also affects our enlisted service members and at the Cape May Coast Guard Training Center, as distinct from the Academy, and throughout the service.

So, will you also commit to working with this committee to achieve full accountability and a lasting, positive cultural change?

Mr. JONES. Thank you for the question, Senator. Absolutely, 100 percent committed to every—not only at every session point, every training center in our Coast Guard, but every unit in our Coast Guard.

100 percent committed to the work that is necessary to ensure that every member of our organization has that work environment where they are trusted, valued, empowered, and safe to do the great work of our Nation.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. I would like to now move forward with our discussion on the status and composition of the domestic icebreaking fleet.

Admiral Fagan, over the past 6 years, Congress has appropriated \$20 million for the acquisition of a new Great Lakes heavy icebreaker. How much of those funds have been expended to date and on what activities?

And if any funding remains, what is the current timeline and spend plan?

Admiral FAGAN. Thank you. Thanks, Senator. And so, I don't have the exact figure of what funds may remain. We will be happy to provide that to you.

But I can talk about, of the funding we have received starting in Fiscal Year 2019, up and through our current Fiscal Year 2024 President budget request for \$55 million to continue to advance procurement and can talk to what we have done with the money that has so far been provided.

From 2019 to 2021, we had \$9 million that were appropriated in survey and design work. We have been conducting ice model testing, indicative design development, a home port feasibility study, and other pre-acquisition activities. Additionally, in 2022, there was \$5.5 million appropriated.

We have staffed a program management office to continue to conduct pre-acquisition activities. And we are ready, should we receive the \$55 million appropriation, to continue to execute on the work necessary to move toward the next step in acquisition development.

And, you know, once we begin that acquisition development in earnest, it moves you toward a request for proposals, lifecycle cost estimates or, you know, the multiple steps that go with a complicated acquisition such as a heavy icebreaker for the Great Lakes. I look forward to an appropriation.

We are committed to that work. We are committed to fielding a second heavy icebreaker. And, again, we are postured and poised, as appropriations come forward, to take those next steps, Senator.

Senator BALDWIN. Great. As mentioned, I worked to secure the Coast Guard's request for \$55 million in the Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations bill for the acquisition of the Great Lakes icebreaker.

Once a final budget is passed, which I hope will be very, very soon, to what extent will the \$55 million advance acquisition of the icebreaker?

Admiral FAGAN. And as you are aware and the audience I am sure is aware, the acquisition of a major asset such as the heavy icebreaker, needs to be done in accordance with Federal acquisitions.

So, there are multiple steps. And as money is appropriated, we will continue to step through the process. And the \$55 million in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget request, along with the \$20 million in the unfunded priority list, would fund program activities associated with the analyze and select phase, allow us to move toward release of a request for proposal, and continue to prepare the program toward award long lead time materials.

You know, each of those are discrete decisions. They do take time to develop, but the money will enable us to continue down the timeline and process that results in a heavy icebreaker on the other side of it.

Senator BALDWIN. And you just mentioned the unfunded priorities. What funding or legislative actions from Congress would help speed up the Coast Guard's acquisition timeline of 10 years after appropriation?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes. So, we are bound by the Federal acquisition rules and requirements, and each one of those, you know, requires

time, due diligence to ensure that we have done the appropriate development, requirements development, and understanding the capabilities and technology that, that is there and available.

And as we continue to move through the phases and acquisition and design, we will continue to work with the Committee and Congress to see if we can speed that time. Building ships is a complicated process and we want to make sure that we have got the best, most capable ship that is fielded, and, you know, we will continue to work deliberately through the process with the Committee. Thank you.

Senator BALDWIN. And when we have our second panel, I think we will hear time is of the essence.

Admiral Hickey, a recent report conducted by the Government Accountability Office cited the Coast Guard's 2022 mission need statement for domestic icebreaking, that indicated that in addition to heavy icebreakers, the Coast Guard had a requirement for 11 medium icebreakers and 7 light icebreakers to replace the current aging fleet.

I am encouraged that the Coast Guard is looking to replace these icebreakers that are over 40 years old. Can you please tell me how many of each of the new medium and light icebreaker—icebreaking vessels under this plan would be indeed assigned to the Great Lakes?

Admiral HICKEY. Thank you, Senator. Yes, ma'am. So, as you noted, we did recently complete the fleet mix analysis and those numbers are accurate. From the Great Lakes perspective, as the Commandant mentioned, we are looking at two heavy icebreakers, right.

Looking forward to that acquisition of our second here. And then six medium icebreakers, right. We have the current fleet of six medium icebreakers, the 140 tugs, 140 foot tugs, that we recently went through the slot program.

But those would ultimately be part of the fleet mix analysis going forward as well, right, as replacement of those eventually. And then, two buoy tending—ice capable buoy tenders, the two 225s.

That is part of the system, our U.S. Coast Guard system, of icebreaking. So again, two heavies, six mediums, and then the two 225s.

Senator BALDWIN. Well, at minimum, we need to replace the aging 140 fleet, medium icebreakers that are here on the Great Lakes. Admiral Fagan, can you commit to maintaining the current number of assets on the Great Lakes?

Admiral FAGAN. Yes, thank you, Senator. As I said, we are committed to building toward that second heavy icebreaker, and that really is the priority and focus as we step into this acquisition.

The six medium, 140 foot ship, you know, icebreakers, we have finished the service life extension there and are committed to continuing to maintain those and operating, and I understand how critical they are to the system of icebreakers here on the Great Lakes. Admiral Hickey mentioned the two 225 ice capable, you know, buoy tending vessels.

And that second 225, which has been going through service life extension, will be back into the lakes later this summer, and so it

will be great to see that capability come back up into the region and be available to contribute to the system of icebreakers.

And I remain committed to the system we have got here, and again, understand the criticality of it to the economic prosperity of the region and continuing to keep commerce flowing.

Senator BALDWIN. OK. Admiral Hickey, can you explain a little bit about the geography that that plan I referenced, the 2022 mission need statement for domestic icebreaking, can you explain about the geography that that plan is based on?

Is the plan's fleet mix based on the icebreaking needs of only the four Great Lakes Tier 1 waterways? Or does it also include the needs of significant Tier 2 waterways, such as the Port of Green Bay?

Admiral HICKEY. Yes, Senator. It accounts for the entire Great Lakes system. So, Tier 1 through Tier 3, Tier 4 waterways, of course, are the privately owned. But, you know, that prioritization of assets is critically important, right, and that is something that we work on in earnest every single day.

We have our ice planning conference at the start of the season or before the start of the season. That is with the Canadian Coast Guard. That is with industry. And we talk about that tiering system and validate that that still is the case, right. Those priorities hold. There are no changes.

And then during the icebreaking season—we will hold daily calls sometimes, twice daily calls to ensure we target our assets at the most critical needs, through—you know, with and through our industry stakeholders to make sure we are accounting for what they are seeing on the waterways.

That tiering system is critically important. It was developed in conjunction with industry in 2010. And really, that shifted the framework from a response driven framework where we were responding to needs that arose, to a prevention minded framework where we target our assets in advance toward those highest priority waterways.

And those highest priorities are set by the flow of commerce and the susceptibility of impacts to icing. And so, we will continue to do that. We will continue to collaborate with industry on that.

In fact, that is not a status quo, right. Status quo is the risk position, as the Commandant reminds us. We look at that every single year. In fact, we have two requests that we are considering right now. One from the port of Duluth. Deb DeLuca has submitted a request, and I had a good conversation—

Senator BALDWIN. We like to call it the Port of Superior.

Admiral HICKEY. Sorry, my bad, my bad.

Senator BALDWIN. Duluth.

[Laughter.]

Admiral HICKEY. Know where you are, right, yes. And part of Duluth's—and then another one from Green Bay that just came in. I haven't had a chance to talk to the director yet, but we are going to do that and will assess that on an ongoing basis. Thanks, Senator.

Senator BALDWIN. I am going to focus a little bit more about this, Admiral Hickey.

The Coast Guard designates waterways that connect the Great Lakes as Tier 1, meaning they get priority when it comes to allocation of Coast Guard icebreaking assets. And both the Port of Green Bay and the Port of Superior, Duluth, ship commodities that are critical to the economy and to the livability of the region, including fuel and agricultural projects—products.

Nevertheless, these ports receive a Tier 2 designation, meaning that they have to wait, and often as I have heard feedback, a lengthy amount of time to receive Coast Guard icebreaking services.

The Coast Guard's own icebreaking plan acknowledges that some of the major Tier 1 waterways depend upon Tier 2 waterways that connect them for commerce. What will it take to meet both Tier 1 and Tier 2 icebreaking needs?

Admiral HICKEY. Yes, Senator. So, I think the team, as I described how they prioritize the resources and the activities, does generally a great job of accomplishing that and meeting the requirements and our performance standards in a typical ice year, right.

Where we have challenges is in those severe years. You mentioned 2014, 2015, and 2018 most recently. So, we have been challenged to meet those performance standards, and quite honestly, we have fallen short in those years.

The acquisition of that second heavy icebreaker is going to be a game changer in meeting those performance requirements in those severe ice years.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. I want to pivot to what I think we all acknowledge is the most important asset that the Coast Guard has. And that is, the Coast Guard people, right. And so, sticking with you, Admiral Hickey, the Coast Guard has faced a recruiting shortfall for years. How is this shortfall affecting operations on the Great Lakes?

Admiral HICKEY. Yes, Senator. So, you are aware, we are in one of our most challenging personnel shortages situation, certainly in my 34 year affiliation with the service, and that has manifested itself right here in D-9.

There is—we are 10 percent short across the enlisted workforce, but it is more acute than that in our critical ratings at our boat forces units, like our boatswain's mates, our electrician mates, our machinist mates.

And so, what that has forced us to do collectively across the service is reassess our force alignment. And we have a force alignment initiative across the service to prioritize our assets to meet our most important mission requirements.

And certainly, top on that list is safety of life at sea, search and rescue. And so, what we have done across the service and here in Dunedin, and if we bring it home to Wisconsin in a second here, we have consolidated our resources at certain operational centers so that we can best effect readiness and response across the entire AOR, area of responsibility.

And so, what that means here in Wisconsin is there are three seasonal small boat stations that you are aware of, ma'am, Green Bay, Station Washington Island, and two rivers that we will operate as forward operating locations so we will not have a B zero

asset, or, you know, immediate response manned 24/7 there, but we will be able to cover those AORs from their parent stations by focusing the resources there.

Similarly, but differently, we have Station Kenosha, which is not a seasonal station, that we are reducing manning on so that we can focus resources in adjacent stations, in Milwaukee and Chicago.

And because there is redundancies built into the system, right, and those response capabilities at those locations and with our air stations have complete overlap of that station's AOR, we are able to meet mission requirements at Station Kenosha, again, without a PO 24/7.

We will do a 40 hour a week response posture there where we schedule those based on risk, right, and operational demand.

Senator BALDWIN. Master Chief Jones, the top issue that I hear from Coast Guard families are about access to housing, access to quality medical care, and access to childcare. We have worked together to expand access to childcare, as was referenced.

Signed into law as part of the National Defense Authorization Act, I secured a provision that would allow for discounts at child development centers for service members with more than one child enrolled, as well as a childcare subsidy program.

I understand that challenges still exist, due to a lack of availability in many local communities. Can you please provide me with a status update on the childcare subsidy program and any additional suggestions that you have to improve access for families?

Mr. JONES. Thank you, Senator. And you are absolutely 100 percent correct. That is the top things that are on the minds of our workforce, which is a—my major focus is on that retention piece and that is a part of retention. If our families love serving the Coast Guard, they are going to stay.

So, we have got to get these things right. And with the efforts of Congress, we truly appreciate the ability now to make those childcare subsidies directly payable to families, to the members, so that—and we are going to have that complete by mid-summer this year where we are going to be to execute that.

That is going to give a lot of flexibility to the families to determine what childcare works best for them on their schedule. And we, both the feedback that we get both through my office, through our ombudsman at large and the ombudsman network, is that this is just a home run in that area, so we are really looking forward to that flexibility and continued growth into the subsidy program.

Senator BALDWIN. Yes. And I would note on both housing and childcare, these are issues beyond the scope of the Coast Guard.

We have significant challenges in the State of Wisconsin about the availability and affordability of childcare and housing. But moving to housing, I am concerned that the Coast Guard hasn't made the same progress on housing that we have seen incrementally in the childcare arena.

Admiral Fagan, I don't know if you recall, when we were visiting together at the Sturgeon Bay Station and had an opportunity to informally interact with the folks there, there was one single mom who talked about being assigned to Sturgeon Bay fortunately in good weather and started at a campground with her children as she was looking for affordable housing.

She whispered that her kids actually loved it and thought it would be great to always stay there, but they hadn't seen winter yet. So, but that really stuck with me. I have never really forgotten that story.

So, I am concerned again that the Coast Guard hasn't made the same progress on housing. What can we do to improve access to housing for Coast Guard families? First of all, sort of, give me the national picture, and then we will drill down a little bit.

Admiral FAGAN. No, thank you, Senator. I do recall. I do recall that conversation quite vividly. And as you have, pointed out, there is a housing challenge in Wisconsin, but it is—there is a housing challenge across the Nation.

And so, let me—I will answer the question from a macro view, and then perhaps if you would indulge, Admiral Hickey, talk specifically about some of the—some of what we are doing here. So, as the Master Chief alluded to, housing and access to affordable housing is a stressor for our workforce writ large. Availability of adequate housing at a price that can be afforded at the housing rates are really paramount challenges.

And so, one thing is ensuring that the adjustable housing rates that members are entitled to and paid, that they keep pace with the changing, cost dynamics and drivers across the country.

The larger challenge and the more difficult one is actual housing availability. In some locations, and I will use Newport, Rhode Island, as an example, it is a tourist seasonal community, and people had been listing homes on Airbnb, which made them not available for members.

The political leadership there passed legislation to limit how many days it could be listed on Airbnb and eased, you know, eased the housing dilemma there. In other words, more housing was available. We are not a garrison force. We are not—we don't retreat on a big bases.

And so, where there are big bases, access to military housing is helpful. I happen to live in a military housing community, but diversified access, so adequate money, housing availability, leasing and availability, opportunities to lease housing, you know, Government, Coast Guard option leases to provide access availability and reliability for our workforce really become all part of the equation that helps ease the stressors of housing availability.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. So, Master Chief Jones, the Coast Guard has broad leasing authority. In fact, in some places, the Coast Guard is leasing housing for junior members and their families instead of asking those members to find housing on their own. Is the Coast Guard considering expanding the use of these lease programs to help fill the critical housing gaps that we are seeing?

Mr. JONES. Yes. Thank you, Senator. And yes, ma'am, as the Commandant said, I will speak from a macro level, and then if Master Chief Buckman and Admiral Hickey want to talk about—

Senator BALDWIN. Oh, he is next.

Mr. JONES.—specifically the Ninth District. So, in the housing program, as they will speak to, over half of the Government leases that the Coast Guard runs are here in the Ninth District. We have done a lot of work over the last couple years to really expand the

authorities that we have in the Government lease program to push that out.

Yet to be determined if we think that there may be some authorities that we would need, that we would have to seek help from Congress on. If we do discover we need that, we will absolutely let you know immediately.

But we are really pushing out there big time into the Government lease program. I have several points through my career, my wife and children and I had—took the Government lease option, and it really is a burden relief because a Government lease also covers the electricity, the bills like that, and really takes those things that you don't always think of into account.

Senator BALDWIN. Great. Master Chief Buckman, I have heard a lot about access to housing challenges facing Wisconsin Coast Guard families. So, what is the Coast Guard in this region doing to address these concerns? And I will have some more specific follow-ups.

Mr. BUCKMAN. Yes, ma'am, thank you. We are doing quite a bit, as I mentioned in my opening comments. We started the Housing Action Plan, which is being run out of Base Cleveland.

We have our area housing officer there who is just a real whiz at the lease program, and he claims 100 percent success in establishing leases, so we have accepted that challenge and we are really leaning in to get more leases. We also hired recently a local housing officer based out of Milwaukee who is responsible for this whole area. We have quite a few leased houses in the area.

So, every time I and Admiral Hickey go out and visit units, we are really promoting that idea because there is a lack of awareness of how the program works, so we are really trying to advertise it. We are also leveraging our Coast Guard Auxiliarists, who we found have real estate skills and backgrounds, to be a force multiplier for us to find those leases that we have been able to find on our own.

Senator BALDWIN. Pivoting—thank you, Master Chief. Pivoting to access to medical care and especially specialty care such as pediatrics, obstetrics, and behavioral health care, tell me a little bit about how the district identifies, tracks, and works to improve access to medical care here in Wisconsin and across the Great Lakes region?

Mr. BUCKMAN. Yes, ma'am. We—so specialty care is not something I have heard a bit concerned about. Primary care is generally the biggest burden. Once our members are able to get into a primary care provider, the referrals for specialty care seem to be a little bit easier for them. So, we are working with Tricare, and I know MCPOCG is pushing a lot of initiatives to increase capacity and access to either in-network providers or waivers go out of network.

Senator BALDWIN. All right. And can you also share any additional quality of life concerns that you have and any recommendations that you have for better supporting our Coast Guard members stationed in the Great Lakes?

Mr. BUCKMAN. I think we are doing a lot, actually. We are excited where Commandant and MCPOCG are taking in the organization, making it easier to Coast Guard, as Commandant likes to say, is a good phrase for us.

Some of the traditional military talent management rules were really turning around. For example, typically, if a member advanced in pay grade, that would mean they would have to pick up and move even if they just got to their new unit. So, we have allowed them to decline advancement with no penalty.

So, no harm, no foul. They can stay where they are at, let their families be established. Billet banding is another initiative that we brought online where even if you do advance, you can stay in the same position and not necessarily have to move right away. So, we are really doing some creative stuff, and it has really—we are seeing some impact across the district.

Senator BALDWIN. Great. Thank you, Mr. Chief. Admiral Fagan, this committee is waiting eagerly to receive several submissions from the Coast Guard, including a housing plan, as well as a strategy for supporting service members at remote duty stations.

So, will you ensure that those are provided as soon as possible, and will you include an assessment of any statutes or policies in place under the Department of Defense that may also be beneficial to the members of our Coast Guard?

Admiral FAGAN. Thank you, Senator. I am committed to delivering that housing plan and remote duty station assessment. As I said, in general, housing is a challenge nationwide. It takes a slightly different flavor or perspective depending on the specific community you are living in.

But ensuring that we have got the right authorities and right resourcing for our Coast Guard members and their families to access adequate housing is a key priority. We can't do the work that we do if we don't have that reliable access to housing, and I appreciate your support and committed to delivering the report. Thank you, Senator.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. So that concludes the round of questions for our first panel. I am going to suggest we take a five-minute break before bringing the next panel up. But again, I thank you for your presence and your testimony, and the work we will continue to do together.

So, with that, we will take a 5-minute pause.

[The Committee is in a short recess.]

Senator BALDWIN. The second panel of our hearing on "The Importance of Great Lakes Icebreaking to the Regional Economy," and I want to again thank our second panel of witnesses for being here today. I will briefly introduce the witnesses and then we will offer each of them the opportunity to give 5 minute oral testimony.

You are welcomed to submit a longer written statement, should you wish. Dean Haen is the Director of the Brown County Port and Resource Recovery Department. He has held this position since 2011 and has a wealth of professional experience in this area, serving on a number of boards and associations, including the Great Lakes Commission, American Great Lakes Ports Association Board, the Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Wisconsin Transportation Association.

Ken Przybyla is the Vice President of Operations at GLC Minerals, a family owned company that has over 150 years of history on the waterways in and around Green Bay. Mr. Przybyla also has experience as a plant manager and mine manager.

Jim Weakley has been the President of the Great Lakes Carriers Association since 2003. He also serves on the Great Lakes Commission and on the Board of Directors for America's Maritime Partnership. Jim has a long career as a Great Lakes vessel operator and has served in the United States Coast Guard.

The witnesses will now offer their testimony, beginning with Mr. Haen.

**STATEMENT OF DEAN B. HAEN, DIRECTOR, BROWN COUNTY
PORT AND RESOURCE RECOVERY DEPARTMENT**

Mr. HAEN. Good morning and thank you for this prestigious opportunity to testify before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation subcommittee. I appreciate the meeting being held here in Brown County, in the City of Green Bay and right at the Port of Green Bay.

The topic of the importance of Great Lakes icebreaking to the regional economy is vitally important to me. I am Dean Haen. I am the Port Director at the Port of Green Bay, and Green Bay is the westernmost port on the Great Lakes, around the on Lake Michigan of the Great Lakes, offering the shortest, most direct route for shipments between the Midwest and the rest of the world.

The port provides State of the art facilities and advocates for port infrastructure and safe navigation. The types of commodities that you see moving in and out of Green Bay include: limestone, cement, salt, coal, forest products, petroleum products which include diesel, gasoline, and ethanol export, liquid asphalt, gypsum, ash, slag, aluminum components for ship building, and project cargo.

These are collectively valued at more than \$300 million a year. We have a number of businesses that operate within the port: eight do dry bulk, four do liquid bulk, and three do project cargo.

The port of Green Bay is unique in that we have a 16 mile channel. Three of it is in the Fox River, where there is actually activity happening, with 13 of it being in the bay at Green Bay. So, it is a 16 mile channel. The port overall has seen 1.7 million tons of cargo moved through the port last year, carried aboard 170 vessels.

So, 300 and—or, yes, it would be 340 transits per year. The Port of Green Bay has and continues to be a vital part of our regional economy, our history, and our lives. The port generated \$217 million in economic activity based on a study done in 2022, supporting 1,620 jobs with personal income reaching almost \$42 million. This demonstrates high families supporting wages.

The Port activities has also resulted in \$38 million in local, State, and Federal taxes paid, and these taxes support essential services like police, fire, transportation, and education. As Port Director, I have watched and seen the Port significantly evolve over the years with the reduction in coal consumption and now the increased movement of petroleum products by water on the Great Lakes.

Early and late icebreaking are critical to the movements of these petroleum products, among others, into the Port of Green Bay. The Port of Green Bay needs sufficient icebreaking assets available to move cargo, especially during the early and late ice season. The Bay is one of the most heavily iced ports on the Great Lakes, if not

the most heavily ice location on the Great Lakes. The Port is not looking for year round service.

We are looking for the full 9 months that we are allowed to operate within. Green Bay is a Tier 2 waterway, meaning that we are lower priority than the Tier 1 locations. The U.S. Coast Guard breaks Green Bay only after the Soo and the St. Marys River are free of ice. And, you know, Green Bay really should be a Tier 1 designation, just like East—every East Coast port is identified as.

So, we have sent in a letter to the Coast Guard and are asking for that consideration. With regard to icebreaker investment, it is critical that we as a nation invest in the infrastructure that is needed to support efficient and reliable waterborne transportation, especially here in Wisconsin. U.S. Coast Guard icebreakers are critical assets and are particularly important to the port of Green Bay.

Nearly every year, the U.S. heavy icebreaker MACKINAW is needed in Green Bay to clear the vessels leaving in Sturgeon Bay and then open up the Port of Green Bay. With that, the MACKINAW becomes a single point of failure. So, that translates into a risky proposition for ports, shippers, and businesses that need a confident and reliable maritime transportation system.

In conclusion, I applaud Senator Baldwin for her continued advocacy for the Port of Green Bay, for this effort in securing new Coast Guard assets, and I applaud also the Coast Guard with their commitment to the Great Lakes and the Port of Green Bay, and I respectfully ask that the Committee continue to work with the Coast Guard to expedite construction, within a time-frame that is as short as possible, to help out the Great Lakes as a system.

You know, if we have to wait 10 years for a solution, we may miss new opportunities, forcing American workers and the economy to pay the price for that delay, and I am hopeful that the Coast Guard District Nine considers the Great Lakes ports as important as ports in the Northeast of the U.S. and afford us the same level of service. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Haen follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DEAN R. HAEN, DIRECTOR, BROWN COUNTY PORT &
RESOURCE RECOVERY DEPARTMENT

The following testimony provides support for expedited acquisition of a second heavy U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) icebreaker for the Great Lakes and the immediate recapitalization of the 140-foot USCG icebreaking tugs.

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation Subcommittee on Oceans, Fisheries, Climate Change and Manufacturing. I appreciate the meeting being held in Green Bay.

The topic of “The Importance of Great Lakes Icebreaking to the Regional Economy” is of vital importance to me. I am Dean Haen, Port Director for the Port of Green Bay.

The Port of Green Bay is the western-most port of Lake Michigan offering the shortest, most direct route for shipments between the Midwest and the rest of the world. The Port provides modern, state-of-the-art facilities and advocates for port infrastructure and safe navigation to economically handle diverse cargo. Waterborne transportation is an efficient and environmentally friendly mode of transportation.

The Port of Green Bay is a fundamental part of our regional economy, our history and our lives. It plays an important role in the transportation of goods and commodities that are critical to the economic health of the region. The Port of Green Bay receives and/or sends commodities as far south as Sheboygan, Wisconsin, west to Wausau, Wisconsin and north into the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Commodities typically include limestone, cement, salt, coal, forest products, petroleum products (diesel, gasoline and ethanol), liquid asphalt, gypsum, ash, slag, aluminum components, project cargo and other essential commodities annually valued at over \$300 million. Eight (8) terminal operators handle dry bulk commodities such as coal, cement, limestone, salt, gypsum, ash and others. Four (4) terminal operators handle bulk liquids including tallow, petroleum products, chemicals and liquid asphalt. Three (3) general cargo docks are capable of handling machinery, aluminum components, bagged agricultural commodities, wood pulp and other forest products.

The Port of Green Bay plays a vital role in providing Northeast Wisconsin with a natural competitive advantage for businesses to locate and prosper while paying good wages for families to live and thrive in our communities. The Port's economic impact illustrates the profound role the Port plays in our region and its value to both current and future businesses. It includes the direct jobs of dockworkers and ship crew members to the indirect jobs that are generated, such as equipment supplier jobs and jobs at office supply firms. Those who are directly employed use their wages, in part, to purchase goods and services in our community. In addition, businesses' revenue is also used to hire people, purchase goods and services and pay taxes, all adding up to make a significant contribution to our regional economy.

The Port of Green Bay has a 13-mile outer channel leading to the Fox River, where 14 Port businesses span more than three miles upriver. *The recently concluded 2023 shipping season saw 1,782,887 metric tons of cargo.* A total of 170 vessels moved through the Port of Green Bay this past shipping season.

Economic activity generated by the Port of Green Bay during 2022 reached \$217.3 million, an increase of \$70 million since 2017, according to an economic impact study released in 2023. The report also points to 1,620 Wisconsin jobs supported by the Port of Green Bay, an increase of 331 jobs over the 2017 total. Direct personal income paid during 2022 reached \$41.7 million. When combined with induced and indirect income the impact exceeded \$142 million. This demonstrates high, family-supporting wages. Port activities also resulted in \$38 million in local, state and Federal taxes which support essential services like police, fire, transportation and education.

Tier 2 Designation

As Port Director for many years, I've watched as the Port has changed significantly over time. Back in 2006, the Port saw 2.55 million metric tons (mt) of coal. As the use of natural gas has steadily increased, coal tonnage has steadily declined to a historic low of just over 100,000 mt in 2023. Year-over-year coal tonnage is decreasing at 40 percent/year. The Port's past efforts to advocate for more diverse cargo movements and its adaptability have proven valuable and necessary.

With the closure of the Westshore pipeline, petroleum products delivery by vessel continues to grow year after year. Petroleum products are the life blood of the economy, and marine transportation moves this cargo inexpensively into our region. Domestic imports of petroleum products have increased 81 percent and domestic exports have increased 34 percent, along with a return to the foreign export of petroleum products. Early and late ice breaking is critical to the movement of these petroleum products. *The Port of Green Bay is not looking for a year round shipping season but rather sufficient USCG icebreaking assets available to move cargo during the early ice conditions before needing to shut down due to significant ice conditions and recreational use(s) of the bay.*

The bay is one of the most heavily iced places on the Great Lakes. The Port of Green Bay recognizes the recreational users of the bay during heavy ice conditions and is not looking for year-round service. Rather when recreational ice users are unable to use the mid bay ice, the port should stay open with ice breaker assistance to bring in these commodities when weather allows. For the record, I am an avid ice fisherman and know the Bay of Green Bay well and respect all users of the waters of the Great Lakes

According to USCG District Nine, Green Bay is a Tier 2 waterway. That means our port is a lower priority than other waterways for Federal icebreaking. The USCG has and continues to provide ice breaking early and late in our seasons but only after the Soo Locks area is cleared of ice. A Tier 1 waterway designation at Green Bay would ensure USCG has assets available as needed to aid commercial navigation and would also mean delays due to ice would be measured and reported to Congress. Green Bay currently has two (2) terminal operators, Holcim and U.S. Venture, that depend on USCG ice breaking assets to keep commerce flowing. Both have expressed concern about USCG ice breaking capacity and availability to improve the movement of commerce in Green Bay.

Ice Breaker Investment

As mentioned earlier, the Port of Green Bay is a vital part of our regional economy and plays a key role in the transportation of goods and commodities that are critical to the economic health of the region. Opportunities for growth, whether using an existing port facility or developing a new property, makes the port an attractive option for businesses but requires a healthy and dependable Great Lakes Navigation System (GLNS) even during the winter months.

Ports around the Great Lakes continue to compete for cargo, including containerized cargo, which relieves pressure from congested East and West Coast ports bringing goods further into the U.S. and removing trucks and trains from the tightening surface transportation nodes and out of residential communities. It is critical that we as a nation invest in the infrastructure that is needed to support efficient and reliable waterborne transportation, especially here in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin businesses rely on Great Lakes shipping. USCG icebreakers are crucial national assets that support the movement of ships here on the Great Lakes during the winter months. They are particularly important to Green Bay and not just the port but the entire bay where vessels transit daily between March and January.

Unfortunately, our port and the entire Bay of Green Bay is not afforded a priority status for icebreaking by the USCG in the Great Lakes. Unlike harbors on the East Coast like Portland, Maine who the USCG treats with the highest levels of icebreaking service, Green Bay is *not* considered a top priority despite the fact that critical petroleum products move into our port regularly.

As a member of the Great Lakes Maritime Task Force which represents nearly 80 organizations including port authorities, shipboard and shoreside labor, shipyards and terminal operators, we have sent numerous letters documenting the issue with the USCG's inadequate icebreaking fleet and begging for funding to build another heavy icebreaker.

Nearly every year the USCG's only heavy icebreaker is required in Green Bay in order to free the vessels that depart the shipyard in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin to begin the monumental task of restocking raw materials at facilities around the Great Lakes. The smaller 140-foot icebreaking tugs are often unable to break the thick lake ice that forms in Green Bay, which makes the MACKINAW a single point of failure at the start and end of our shipping season.

That translates into a very risky business for ports and facilities around the Great Lakes. If shippers are not confident in a reliable maritime transportation system during the early and late winter months they will withdraw from the business and look elsewhere which would cripple Wisconsin exports and imports.

Conclusion

I applaud your commitment to the Great Lakes, the U.S. shipping industry and the USCG. I respectfully ask that the committee continue to work with the USCG to expedite the construction timeline for the new heavy Great Lakes icebreaker. If we have to wait ten years for a solution, we will miss new opportunities, and American jobs and the economy will pay the price. I am hopeful that USCG District Nine considers Great Lakes ports as important as ports in the Northeast and will afford us the same level of service.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. Next, Mr. Przybyla.

STATEMENT OF KEN PRZYBYLA, VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS, GLC MINERALS

Mr. PRZYBYLA. Good morning. Am I on? No, I am good. Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee. I am Ken Przybyla, Vice President of Operations of GLC Minerals, one of the terminal operators in the Port of Green Bay.

We are a fifth generation Green Bay area legacy business, founded in 1871 as Herbert Calcium and Chemical Company. Located on the banks of the Fox River in Green Bay, Wisconsin, GLC Minerals has become a leader in mineral manufacturing for agronomy, animal nutrition, and industrial applications throughout the Upper Midwest.

GLC processes and distributes calcium carbonate, dolomite, and gypsum products to the agricultural users and manufacturers of glass, plastic, and other products. Our minerals arrive by boat from Great Lakes quarries in the spring and summer months going into fall.

Our location in Green Bay allows for optimal transportation of our products to our customers across the Midwest. The port and our access to the Great Lakes, Saint Lawrence Seaway are essential to our business and the businesses we serve. We believe in using waterways for business. Shipping is an environmentally friendly, sustainable, and cost effective mode of transportation.

GLC recently purchased additional land at the mouth of the Fox River, part of the former Pulliam Power Plant site, which will provide room to expand our mineral processing operations. The purchase will result in an additional \$7.5 million investment by GLC over the next 5 years, creating at least 10 new jobs.

But to continue to grow and be successful, which includes reinvesting in our operations, we need to be able to ship and receive products for as long as possible throughout the shipping season. As you know, ice can form very early in the bay, and that directly impacts our ability to ship and receive commodities and products.

And when we talk about impacts to our business, you have to think about the impacts that go beyond the business itself. If we must cut back and close our operations due to ice, it impacts our employees, our customers and their employees who are relying on our products to continue their operations.

When the movement of goods and—when the movement of goods are curtailed due to ice, that directly impacts our regional economy. But we also need to coexist with those who use the waterways for recreation and tourism, and in winter this means ice fishing, snowmobiling, and other sports.

We know it is not possible to have year round shipping due to the heavy ice in the dead of winter. We also respect those who want to be out on the ice for recreation during the off season. But with a second heavy U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker, we can have a longer shipping season that accommodates everyone and best supports our regional economy.

This is why we support the expedited acquisition of the second heavy U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker for the Great Lakes and the immediate recapitalization of the 140 foot U.S. Coast Guard icebreaking tugs.

On behalf of GLC Minerals, I thank you for coming to Green Bay to hear our testimony and to learn why the icebreaker is so important to our regional economy. And thank you very much to your service, U.S. Coast Guard members. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Przybyla follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KEN PRZYBYLA, VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS,
GLC MINERALS

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Our minerals arrive by boat from Great Lakes quarries in the spring and summer months.

Our location in Green Bay allows for optimal transportation of our products to our customers across the Midwest.

The Port and our access to the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway are essential to our business and the businesses we serve.

We believe in using waterways for business—shipping is an environmentally-friendly, sustainable and cost-effective mode of transportation.

GLC recently purchased additional land at the mouth of the Fox River—part of the former Pulliam Power Plant site—which will provide room to expand our mineral processing operation. The purchase will result in an additional \$7.5 million investment by GLC over the next five years, creating at least 10 new, full-time jobs.

But, to continue to grow and be successful—which includes reinvesting in our operations—we need to be able to ship and receive products for as long as possible throughout the shipping season.

As you know, ice can form very early in the bay and that directly impacts our ability to ship and receive commodities and product.

And when we talk about impacts to our business, you have to think about impacts that go beyond the business itself.

If we must cut back or close our operations due to ice, it impacts our employees, our customers, and their employees who are relying on our products to continue their operations.

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We know it is not possible to have a year-round shipping season due to heavy ice in the dead of winter.

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On behalf of GLC Minerals, I thank you for coming to Green Bay to hear our testimony and to learn why this icebreaker is so important to our regional economy.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. And, next we have Mr. Jim Weakley.

**STATEMENT OF JAMES H. I. WEAKLEY, PRESIDENT,
LAKE CARRIERS' ASSOCIATION**

Mr. WEAKLEY. The Lake Carriers' Association has advocated for Great Lakes icebreaking resources for decades and been stymied by inappropriate performance metrics. The Coast Guard claims success despite serious ice delays.

We hired an expert in Coast Guard icebreaking who previously held three command positions on Great Lakes icebreakers and retired as the Coast Guard icebreaking program manager. The system annually saves consumers \$3.9 billion, generates \$26 billion in U.S. economic activity, \$6 billion in taxes, 150,000 U.S. jobs, and \$17.8 billion in wages.

An economist estimated a \$2 billion, 10,000 job loss from inadequate icebreaking over 10 years. Lakers have been beset for days awaiting the MACKINAW because of a casualty or scheduled maintenance. During a 2023 polar vortex, MACKINAW was not available due to a casualty.

Later in 2023, MACKINAW was towed home with an electrical problem. During ice induced flooding in 2021, MACKINAW was not available. With only one heavy icebreaker or GLIB, ports, vessels, facilities, and homeowners feel the pain.

A new GLIB is needed now. The Coast Guard demands 10 years after receiving construction funding to acquire one. The Great Lakes region risks another \$2 billion and 10,000 jobs waiting.

U.S. Coast Guard icebreakers lost 246 operational days during the 2017, 2018 ice season, and another 182 days during the 2018, 2019 season. Casualties are problematic in the 40 year old, 140 foot long icebreaking tug fleet.

When Katmai Bay's heating system failed, they operated in sub-zero temperatures with small space heaters and heavy clothing. Luckily, we are at historically low ice levels because several ice breakers, including the MACKINAW, are not operational.

Supposedly the 140 Service Life Extension Program breathed new life. I disagree. The 1970s era engines were not replaced, causing stack fires and other emergency repairs. We are unlikely to see a 140 replacement until 2040. In 1979, the U.S. and Canadian Coast Guards maintained 20 ice breakers on the lakes, including two GLIBs. Today, they operate 11, including two less ice capable buoy tenders.

The USCG measures the ability to free a beset vessel within 24 hours in only four waterways. None of Wisconsin is in any of those four waterways. A vessel could literally be stuck for the entire winter in Green Bay. It would not count. They justified fewer icebreakers by lowering their level of service.

We need to fix this, to fight for future icebreaking resources and to capture the impacts of the inadequate fleet. I appreciate Admiral Fagan's support for another GLIB. The Fiscal Year 2024 budget request included \$55 million in construction funding. I believe the Coast Guard will not be honest and transparent. They will continue to deny the problems with the 140s and use flawed performance metrics.

They claimed two tugs were as capable as the old MACKINAW. They claim that the new MACKINAW is as capable as the old. Both are false. They will again claim that technology can provide a smaller, more capable icebreaker. Bells and whistles can't replace horsepower and vessel size, particularly when breaking a path for a 105 foot wide ice breaker—laker.

Senator Baldwin, I applaud your commitment to the Great Lakes, the U.S. economy, and the United States Coast Guard. I fear the Coast Guard's acquisitions goals and priorities will supersede Congressional direction and the needs of the Great Lakes region. Coast Guard acquisitions has no lower priority than icebreaking.

The Coast Guard outmaneuvered Congressman Obi on this. He was ready to fully fund a second MACKINAW under the Open

Shipyard contract with 2008 stimulus funds. My guess is that they are planning to outmaneuver you as well.

My guess is they are planning for a smaller, less capable icebreaker than the MACKINAW, and they will do nothing with the 140 fleet. Unless Congress holds the Coast Guard accountable and forces them to do the right thing, we won't see even a less capable GLIB for 10 years, or a 140 replacement for 20. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Weakley follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAMES H. I. WEAKLEY, PRESIDENT,
LAKE CARRIERS' ASSOCIATION

The Lake Carriers' Association has been advocating for additional U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) icebreaking resources for the Great Lakes for decades including the construction of the current heavy icebreaker MACKINAW commissioned in 2006. Our efforts have been stymied in the past by a lack of transparent Domestic Icebreaking performance measures where the USCG claimed success with the mission despite serious winter shipping delays. To counter the false claims, we hired an expert in USCG icebreaking who previously held command positions on three USCG Great Lakes icebreakers and finished his career in uniform as the Program Manager for all USCG ice operations including polar icebreaking, domestic icebreaking encompassing the Northeast and Great Lakes, and the International Ice Patrol.

The below testimony provides support for acquisition of a second heavy USCG icebreaker for the Great Lakes and the immediate recapitalization of the USCG 140-foot icebreaking tug fleet.

Since 1880, the Lake Carriers' Association (LCA) has represented the U.S.-flag Great Lakes fleet, which today can move 90 million tons of cargos annually. These cargos are the building blocks of American manufacturing, infrastructure, and energy: iron ore, construction stone, coal, cement, and other dry bulk materials such as grain, salt, and sand.

A reliable Great Lakes Navigation System (GLNS) is critical to the success of our Nation and the economy. Similar to interstate highways, infrastructure is a key component to a safe and efficient maritime system. USCG icebreakers are a critical piece of maritime infrastructure which, when adequate in both numbers and capability, facilitate the movement of commerce via the most economically and environmentally friendly mode of transportation: bulk cargo ships known as "Lakers" on the Great Lakes.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) estimates that the GLNS results in an annual transportation rate savings of \$3.9 billion annually. A recent report, *Economic Impacts of Maritime Shipping in the Great Lakes*, highlights Great Lakes shipping's contribution to the economic success of our Nation. The industry drives \$36 billion in annual economic activity, which generates more than \$6 billion in Federal, State, and local tax revenue annually. Almost 150,000 U.S. jobs are tied to our fourth seacoast and more than \$17.8 billion in family sustaining wages are paid every year.

The economic impact of inadequate icebreaking is staggering. A study commissioned by LCA and completed by Martin and Associates, a well-respected economist, found that over the course of the last ten years \$2 billion in economic activity and 10,000 jobs have been lost due to a lack of sufficient USCG icebreaking on the Great Lakes. U.S. cargo vessels have been left stranded for days in waterways around the Great Lakes, often awaiting assistance from the only heavy Great Lakes icebreaker, MACKINAW. Unfortunately, when MACKINAW is unavailable due to a casualty or scheduled maintenance, shipping companies, ports, and jobs suffer.

During the height of ice onset in 2023, MACKINAW was not available due to a casualty. Last year, MACKINAW also was unavailable during the early part of the ice season and had to be towed back to homeport with an electrical problem. When a serious ice jam occurred in the St. Clair River in February 2021 requiring a heavy icebreaker to relieve coastal community flooding north of Detroit, MI, MACKINAW was once again unavailable. With only one heavy icebreaker on the Great Lakes when heavy ice conditions persist across their vast expanse, the USCG is forced into deciding which port, which vessels, and which facilities will bear the pain.

While a new USCG heavy Great Lakes icebreaker is needed now, the USCG has stated it will take 10-years to build one after they receive construction funds. which is the same timeline the new \$3.2 billion Soo Lock mega project will take. LCA finds

that timeline unacceptable and untenable that we must endure another \$2 billion impact with additional lost jobs while waiting for this new icebreaker.

It is not just MACKINAW that faces challenges to remaining operational during the ice season. A direct correlation can be made between casualties and the severity of the ice season. In total, the USCG fleet on the Great Lakes suffered 246 lost operational days during the 2017/2018 ice season and another 182 during the 2018/2019 ice season, two of the heaviest ice seasons during the past decade. Based on LCA's observations over the past two years, these casualties are increasing at an alarming rate, particularly in the 40-year-old 140-foot icebreaking tug fleet. The USCG men and women sailing these vessels are subject to work-arounds to critical failing operational components. In fact, when KATMAI BAY's boiler heating system failed last year, the crew bravely continued to operate in sub-zero temperatures with portable space heaters and heavy clothing.

The USCG has claimed they have extended the life of the 140s with their Service Life Extension Program (SLEP), but I respectfully disagree. Since the 1970s era main propulsion engines were not replaced or overhauled during that SLEP, annual failures have forced these critical icebreaking resources to the dock for emergency repairs on several occasions. The USCG Great Lakes icebreaking mission is facing a complete collapse, and the fallout will be the shuttering of domestic steel production, which will have massive impacts on our national and economic security.

The real question is how did we get to this point of certain failure? In 1979, the U.S. and Canadian Coast Guards maintained a combined 20 icebreakers on the Great Lakes, including two heavy USCG icebreakers. Today, that number is eleven which includes two less ice capable buoy tenders. The USCG operates nine while the Canadian Coast Guard operate two, and they claim to work as one team. However, the Canadian commercial fleet receives a higher level of service from both the USCG and Canadian Coast Guard due to a glaring difference in performance measures. The Canadian Coast Guard measures their ability to get to a vessel stuck in ice within eight hours *anywhere* on the Great Lakes or St. Lawrence Seaway, while the USCG only measures their ability to free a vessel within 24-hours of being stuck in one of only four waterways. Green Bay is not one of those waterways; in fact, no Wisconsin waters are in those four waterways. A vessel could be stuck for a month in the middle of the bay and the USCG would not count this as a mission failure.

The Canadian Coast Guard has justified their reduction in Great Lakes icebreakers by using USCG icebreakers to meet their higher level of service in Canadian waters. The USCG has justified their reduction by lowering their level of service to U.S. waters and U.S. ships. After enactment of the 2022 Coast Guard authorization Act, I believe the USCG has realized there is an issue with their icebreaking performance measures on the Great Lakes and trust that they, in consultation with U.S. vessel operators, will find a reasonable solution that accurately measures the ability of winter commerce to move safely and efficiently on the Great Lakes. This needs to happen now, as the Great Lakes will have to fight for future USCG icebreaking assets and the actual impacts of the currently inadequate fleet need to be captured.

I was pleased to hear that Admiral Fagan has put her full support into acquiring another heavy icebreaker for the Great Lakes and the Fiscal Year 2024 budget request included \$55 million in construction funding, but ten years is too long to wait for this vital national asset. The acquisition process must be accelerated.

Based on the current timeline for the new heavy icebreaker, I can only assume that the timeline for replacing the fleet of 140-foot icebreaking tugs will be even longer as there are more of them to replace. The USCG should act now to start the process of replacing these aging assets.

Icebreaking is a contact sport requiring stout vessels that can withstand the daily punishment during the winter months. I commend the crews of these vessels who work in some of the most challenging environments on the planet, but they deserve to have the proper tools to perform the job effectively and safely. I also commend the U.S. merchant sailors who struggle to deliver their critical cargos faced with inadequate USCG resources statutorily tasked with assisting commerce in the winter on the Great Lakes.

Conclusion

Senator Baldwin, I applaud your commitment to the Great Lakes, the U.S. shipping industry, and the USCG. I respectfully ask that the Commerce Committee continue to work with the USCG to expedite the construction timeline for the new heavy Great Lakes icebreaker. The original heavy Great Lakes icebreaker MACKINAW was authorized and received full appropriations on December 17, 1941 ten days after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The vessel was operational assisting vital

war time domestic steel production three years later. While that timeline probably can't be replicated during peacetime, we all should be striving to approach it.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you all for your opening statements. We are going to now turn to a round of questioning. And I want to begin with Dean Haen. As we all know, the Port of Green Bay handles a large volume of cargo and has a tremendous impact on the Wisconsin economy, supporting jobs and generating tax revenue.

Mr. Haen, thank you for highlighting the significant role the Port of Green Bay plays in both the Wisconsin economy as well as our whole region. Can you further describe the extent of the port's impact on the economic health of the region and how enabling maritime transportation of goods and commodities supports a critical diversity of transportation, options that are good for business and good for Wisconsin?

Mr. HAEN. Yes, thank you. In addition to my oral remarks, the port generates \$142 million in wages, salaries, and local consumption expenditures in the regional economy, and the Port of Green Bay serves an area as far South as Sheboygan, over past Wausau, and up into the Yuppies.

So that—we are the unique economic engine that is here at the Port of Green Bay. So not every city has the opportunity to have an international port and there is a lot of economic benefit from having that port located in your community.

So, with that, you know, just waterborne transportation, it moves things, as Ken mentioned, safely and very cost effectively. So, it is a significant economic opportunity that we need to maximize.

Senator BALDWIN. Yes. Thank you. I want to also make sure that we emphasize just how many industries rely on the port of Green Bay and depend upon movement of goods through the bay.

Mr. Haen, thank you for including in your submitted testimony a description of that diversity of commodities that the Port of Green Bay sends and receives. Can you talk about the different types of cargo handled in the port and their importance in this region?

Mr. HAEN. Certainly. Petroleum products obviously fuel our economy. So, diesel and gasoline are coming into the region to—for local consumers as well as our manufacturers. In addition, our agricultural industries are exporting ethanol to go into fuel additives on the East Coast.

So that is kind of what happens with petroleum products. With regard to other commodities, cement and liquid asphalt are really easy for people to relate to. They are going to road construction. And the fact that we have the port here, that unique economic engine that I mentioned—you know, taxes are lowered, the ability to build roads are cheaper when you can have that low cost delivery of those raw materials.

Other commodities, forest products. We see a lot of eucalyptus wood pulp come into the Port of Green Bay, and that goes into high end paper making products like diapers and Swiffer and other things that are made by Kimberly Clark and, Procter & Gamble. In addition, you know, Ken works in limestone.

And you can talk more about that, but limestone is a very unique and widely applied commodity that is used in everything from pol-

lution prevention applications to agricultural applications to, you know, your calcium pills that you have people take, to just—it goes into your toothpaste. It is part of the scrubbing action that is added to toothpaste.

So, it is really unique, and I think those are probably the commodities that I am comfortable addressing. The other ones are, you know, coal obviously is for energy, and we have other commodities that are in much smaller volume.

Senator BALDWIN. Given the number of businesses that depend on both the port and the bay, can you describe some of the challenges they face when there is insufficient icebreaking capacity, or conducted here in the Port of Green Bay?

Mr. HAEN. Yes, thank you. So, we have two users that want to run vessels as late as they can and then start as early as they can. And one of them being U.S. Venture who moves petroleum products. So, because that is continuously consumed, if weather allows, they will move vessels as long as they can.

In addition, other commodities like cement are limited in what they can store. So, if weather allows and they are consuming those products, they will seek icebreaker assistance to bring in those commodities.

So, these are the two users, that would be Wholesome Cement and St. Mary Cement, along with U.S. Venture that generally rely on icebreaker assistance. So, in late part of the season, they are looking for icebreakers to keep the channel open. And then in the spring, any time after March 15, we are looking for icebreaker assistance.

And just talking about some of their—some of the struggles that they have, this year we shouldn't have any. March 15 is our designated start date, and we will be open, but Mother Nature did that. In other years, during low ice, it is either Mother Nature or the Coast Guard that helps us open up very near March 15.

But then what happens during, heavy ice years? That is where the port of Green Bay sits and waits, and we can sit and wait anywhere from 20 to 30 days waiting for the Soo and the St. Marys River to be cleared of ice before those assets can be redeployed to Green Bay to open up Green Bay.

And some of those heavy ice years, I was looking back at our start dates and those heavy ice years, and the most recent ones 2008, 2009, 2014, 2015, and 2019, we experienced those 20 to 30 day waits for the Port of Green Bay to open.

Senator BALDWIN. Yes. I think you have just answered this question, but I was going to ask specifically what are some of the complaints from dock owners in your port regarding the ability to move cargo during winter?

Mr. HAEN. Yes, those would be the primary ones.

Senator BALDWIN. Yes. OK. We previously received estimates that the Coast Guard—from the Coast Guard, that a new heavy icebreaker for the Great Lakes may take as long as 10 years to acquire.

Mr. Haen, I know you are working diligently on an expansion of the port that will provide significant economic growth for the region for years to come. Can you describe how your intended timeline for port expansion, and how a 10 year wait for the Coast

Guard to provide additional heavy icebreakers, how will that impact those plans?

Mr. HAEN. Well, it does play a role in those plans. And just to touch base on that project, we are again, very thankful for your help in helping us secure some of the funding needed to make that reality right before us.

So, we have secured about \$34 million, and we are looking for another \$20 million to take a decommissioned power plant and turn it into a State of the art port facility. That facility is planned to have—and we had a third party do it, that it would have an economic impact of \$87 million in the first 5 years that it is open.

But obviously, you know, the facility can realize that, but we need the assurances that we have icebreaking so that we can find the highest and best user for that facility. And, you know, being limited to a 9-month ice season, or I mean, shipping season, it is critical that we have that full 9 months in order for someone to make the investments and to move the cargoes that they are going to be looking to move.

Senator BALDWIN. Yes, just emphasizing that point, how does the lack of assurance from the Coast Guard that there will be sufficient icebreaking impact a company's decision whether or not to do business with the port?

Mr. HAEN. Well, as with all Great Lakes ports, with the nine-month season, we are challenged already with having that window of time where, you know, manufacturers, producers, receivers need to transition to something different during those 3 months that we are closed.

So that that is just a baseline understanding across the Great Lakes. And we certainly don't need that to be any more than 3 month limitation. So having the assurances that we have ice breaker capacity is critical to keep that window as short as possible.

Senator BALDWIN. Great. In 2022, Brown County secured over \$10 million for the Port of Green Bay development project through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Port Infrastructure Development Program, which received over—that whole program received over \$2 billion in the bipartisan infrastructure law.

I supported the bipartisan infrastructure law and this project, and I am working to ensure that Wisconsin and the Great Lakes receive our fair share of the port funding that is available. Can you speak to the importance of the port receiving those funds? And what does it really mean to the Green Bay community?

Mr. HAEN. Thank you, Senator. Those funds are great opportunities that a small community like the Port of Green Bay wouldn't otherwise be able to realize. You know, to take a decommissioned power plant is \$50 plus million dollars.

So, looking, to contribute as a local—we are limited in what we can contribute. So, we have reached out to State and Federal agencies have been very successful in getting that support. So, it is critical in order to invest in our future, having the partnerships we need with the State and with the Federal Government.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. Mr. Przybyla, thank you for being here for today. I think it is so important that we hear directly from business leaders themselves, and I appreciate your help in illus-

trating how crucial commerce on the Great Lakes is to Green Bay and the entire regional economy.

Your business is unique in some ways because your fundamental mission is to keep other businesses running. In your testimony, you described how your company supports a wide variety of industries.

Can you give us an idea of the types of industry, your customers, that would be harmed and the types of products that would not be available if you were unable to ship your goods?

Mr. PRZYBYLA. Certainly. Animal nutrition is one of our primary customers. With that, you have primarily in Wisconsin, that is dairy cows and cheese. So, if you do not have the material calcium from the limestone, magnesium from the dolomite, then you will have a reduction of sustainable minerals, we call them macro minerals, that increases the yield of milk from the cows.

So, we have roughly two days' worth of inventory so that when we have an incident similar to what happened in 2014, 95 percent of the lakes were covered with ice, we were unable to receive a vessel that was scheduled for early spring. We had to ship from Roger City, Michigan by truck 300 miles one way material in to keep our process running.

So, if you look at 25,000 tons on a vessel, that would be 1,000 trucks put on the road to get to Green Bay. Obviously, that put us in a quite a bind. We eventually did receive the vessel. Also, we have agronomy customers.

So, the health of the soil. So that is important and also relates to the yield of milk from the cows, in that as you grow crops, the crops absorb the moisture into the plant and then leave behind the need for additional minerals that we supply to that also. And about 80, 90 percent of the corn growing in Wisconsin is for the dairy process.

And then we also have manufacturing such as glass, float glass, plastics, adhesives and sealants. Those are customers that have relatively low inventory in stock, and we are—our model is “keep business running.” We guarantee that we will deliver on time so that we keep your business running.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. Can you describe why the Port of Green Bay is a strategic location for your business, and how important access to the Great Lakes is to both you and your customers?

Mr. PRZYBYLA. Sure. The Great Lakes and the Saint Lawrence Seaway is very important to us. We have shipped materials from Newfoundland that has come through the Saint Lawrence Seaway.

And we also have the Great Lakes quarries that we deal with in Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. We also have other modes of transportation for shipping our end product out, trucks and rail. It is ideal for us. It gives us the three modes of transportation. And the icebreaker would allow us to extend our season to be able to grow our business.

Senator BALDWIN. Tell me a little bit about the difficult winters during which bringing raw materials in and shipping your products out were restricted. And can you describe how the alternative methods of shipping, such as via ground, truck, or rail are more expensive? Give us a sense of that difference.

Mr. PRZYBYLA. So, as I said, the 25,000 tons would be 1,000 truckloads, or it would be 250 rail cars. And the rail car—for us,

the rail cars wouldn't work at all. We don't have access from the quarries to rail.

So that is not even feasible to get raw materials in that way. The other thing that we have is trucking. Of course, the distance that has to be covered by truck from the quarries would be—we would not be in business if it was not for the Great Lakes.

Senator BALDWIN. And last, think about the length of your shipping season currently and how a longer shipping season would be an economic boost not just for you, but for the customers that you support.

Mr. PRZYBYLA. Certainly. We have additional costs related to winter storage of materials. If we did not have that, we would be able to increase our output and our customer base would also grow.

And we are, you know, through innovation and new product development, our reach is getting farther and farther, so our demand for stone will continue to increase as we reach toward the West and to the South and to the East also by truck and rail for shipping our products.

And then there is also the possibility of being able to ship outgoing products. We have shipped barges to Michigan from here. But, you know, there are other possibilities to go over into Lake Erie, Lake Ontario also.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Przybyla. Mr. Weakley, now that we have discussed how important icebreaking is to the Port of Green Bay and the businesses that are located here, I am really eager to discuss with you the significance of icebreaking to the entire region.

But do you think the Coast Guard has articulated or has currently adequate resources to accomplish its icebreaking mission on the Great Lakes? And do you think that it is plans—you know moving forward, will be adequate?

Mr. WEAKLEY. Thank you for the question, Senator. I would say absolutely not do they have the adequate resources to maintain the Great Lakes navigation system. The previous gentleman talked about the importance of the supply chain.

I would say the Coast Guard has the ability to manage one problem area at a time. If the Straits are a problem, they can handle it. If the St. Marys are a problem, they can handle it. If Detroit is a problem, they can handle it. They can't handle two of those four waterways that are a problem at a time.

We have seen that year over year. I was pleasantly surprised when the Commandant said that she wasn't going to reduce the number of 140 replacements for the Great Lakes, but I was equally surprised that they are going to add two to the East Coast. That demonstrates the importance of the flawed metric application of the Great Lakes and the opportunistic application of the metrics on the East Coast.

Keep in mind, East Coast ice is easier than Great Lakes ice. We have fresh water. It is solid. It is hard. It is blue. It is beautiful. The East Coast, it is saltwater laden. They have a tidal flow, so the tidal flow will break the ice up. On the East Coast, I am probably getting ahead of myself, they have 25 Coast Guard assets that are capable of breaking ice.

I am counting the 140s, the 65 icebreaking tugs, the 225s, and the 175s. I think Great Lakes, we got 11. So, you know, their plan is East Coast centric. Going forward, I am very grateful we will get the additional GLIB. Is it enough? Absolutely not, particularly if you applied the same metrics on the East Coast that you do on the Great Lakes.

No doubt Superior and no doubt Green Bay would be Tier 1 waterways if they were on the East Coast. 35 Tier 1 waterways from New York, North. We have got four. It is disappointing, to say the least.

Senator BALDWIN. Yes. What are the risks associated with having inadequate domestic icebreaking assets, as you have just outlined?

Mr. WEAKLEY. So, we have talked about the economic risk, the supply chain risks, not just to my members, but to GLC's customers, right. And it is the cascade effect.

Collisions, we have seen ice—two lakers had a collision in the Straits of Mackinaw in 2014, a Tier 1 waterway, because of lack of adequate icebreaking. One laker tried to go close to a beset one to free it up. It didn't work out and they had a collision.

Cost \$7 million of damage. Groundings, we saw an instance where the Coast Guard didn't have enough resources to manage the upbound in the downbound channel in St. Marys River. The first downbound laker was forced to go down the upbound channel, ice forced it out of the channel and hold itself flooding. Fortunately, no injuries or loss of life or pollution, but clearly flooding is a risk to vessels, but also to homes.

In 2021, we saw massive flooding along the Detroit Saint Clair River because of an ice dam. And I am going to throw this one out to the mothers of the toddlers in the audience. In 2018, we almost had a Cheerios crisis, right. We were trying to get grain from Superior, Wisconsin to General Mills in Buffalo, New York.

Buffalo was iced in. They were on the verge of running out of grain for the mill that supplied our Nation's Cheerios. Could you imagine the tragedy among the toddlers of the world when we ran out of Cheerios, all because a lack of Coast Guard icebreaking.

So, it not just impacts us, not just their members, it impacts the toddlers of America. That is how important icebreaking is to our national economy. And those are the risks that we face on a daily basis.

Senator BALDWIN. Yes. My next question was going to be about comparing the Great Lakes assets to those assigned to the East Coast. You already addressed that. I would like you to describe a little bit about the economic loss that can occur to the region in icy years. So, including those three in the last decade, 2014, 2015, and 2018.

Mr. WEAKLEY. So, we hired an economist to look at the impacts of the cargoes that were delayed. In 2014, we calculated it was a \$705 million loss and 3,800 jobs were lost because of the cargo that was delayed.

In 2015, we calculated a \$335 million loss and 2,000 jobs. But I will tell you that that is an underestimate because in 2015 the Coast Guard Admiral asked us not to sail because he knew he could not move the commerce.

So, we did not count the delayed ships that didn't sail for a week, two weeks. We only counted the delays that were incurred of vessels that were beset. So, I would say that number is probably half of what it actually should be. And in 2018, we did a little better job of calculating our delays.

We used to say an economist, went back to him, and he calculated \$1 billion in economic loss to the Great Lakes region and 5,400 jobs lost just from the cargo delays that couldn't move because of the iron ore that didn't result in steel, the coal that didn't result in electrical power, the limestone that didn't result in, you know, good Wisconsin dairy products. Those are just economic losses.

And I have no idea how to calculate the loss of a result of flooding. If you look at the 2021 floods up and down the Algonac River, the Detroit, Sinclair River, it was catastrophic to those homeowners and business owners along that, all because the Coast Guard didn't have the ability to do the job.

And I am always very careful not to criticize the men and women of the United States Coast Guard, being one formerly myself. I think the problem is a lack of resources, a lack of focus, and the Coast Guard will always have higher priorities in the Great Lakes.

Senator BALDWIN. You just referenced this anecdotally, about the Coast Guard recommending to a company that they not embark on any voyages because there would be inadequate icebreaking capabilities. Do you have—beyond anecdotal stories, a sense of how many companies that impacted?

Mr. WEAKLEY. Yes, Senator. And with your permission, I will enter a copy of that letter on the record.

Senator BALDWIN. Without objection.

[The information referred to was unavailable at time of printing.]

Mr. WEAKLEY. And I will also enter—

Mr. WEAKLEY. Usually say that to colleagues, but—

[Laughter.]

Mr. WEAKLEY. And also, Senator, with your permission, I will provide more detailed descriptions of the problems we had in 2014, 2015 and 2018.

Senator BALDWIN. OK.

Mr. WEAKLEY. We have been writing letters to the Coast Guard documenting that. So, an entire—the letter from the Admiral Midgette in 2015 impacted the entire industry, both the Canadian fleet and the American fleet. Basically, all the companies delayed by a few days, some delayed by weeks.

There was one company that elected to go out earlier than the others, in spite of the Admiral's plea. And to tell you the truth, it backfired on those companies that were more risk averse because that company got all the Coast Guard assets to get them through, so they were more successful, but you would not believe the pressure from our customers.

In fact, the company that went out and took what I believe was an unnecessary risk or an excessive risk compared to the other members, used it as a marketing campaign. So, if it happened again, I would think the other customers would put just as much pressure, and sadly, our members would be less risk sensitive.

So, I think the Admiral did the right thing. His letter talks about 7 feet of brash ice in the Detroit, Saint Clair River. And it was impenetrable, but, you know, somebody took the risk, and it paid off financially for them.

Senator BALDWIN. As we have already discussed, the Coast Guard has provided in a report to Congress that there is an estimated 10 year timeline to deliver a new Great Lakes heavy icebreaker. Mr. Weakley, in your opinion, I already know the answer to this—is it a reasonable timeframe?

Let me not ask that question, but answer two questions. What are the impacts to the U.S. industry of such a long timeline, and what do you believe is a reasonable timeframe where this would be achievable?

Obviously, as the Commandant reflected, there are a lot of laws and rules and regulations that have to be followed, and you can't skip important steps in this process, but what would be a reasonable timeframe?

Mr. WEAKLEY. So, if I may respectfully push back on the Commandant's earlier statement—and she is absolutely correct, those laws have to be followed. But there are also laws that allow for single source and there are regulations within the Department of Homeland Security, when the Coast Guard could have purchased a second MACKINAW class hull with a single purchase designed, approved vessel.

The Coast Guard successfully fought us on that. They refused to do that. We had an excellent meeting, thanks to you and your staff and Fincantieri Marine. We talked about that. The Coast Guard refused to do that.

They believe that they have to start with a fresh piece of white paper and design from scratch. The MACKINAW has a proven hull. If they went with a parent class using the MACKINAW hull, they could expedite that process.

So, there are ways around that. We actually even introduced legislative language to make that process go further, thanks to you, Senator, and some of your colleagues. Coast Guard acquisitions and Coast Guard legislation successfully fought us on that. So, had the Coast Guard listened to us 5 years ago, we would be looking, I believe, at a delivered Great Lakes ice breaker as we speak.

I always use the comparison of the Army Corps of Engineers building a \$3 billion new lock in 10 years, the same amount of time the Coast Guard is requiring it. I believe President Kennedy said we could put a man on the moon before the end of the decade in 1960, and in 1968 we did that.

It will take the Coast Guard longer to acquire an ice breaker than we took to put a man and safely return him from the moon. I think they could do better if they wanted to. I think they choose not to.

Senator BALDWIN. All right. Thank you, Mr. Weakley. On that note, I am going to—I have concluded my questions. I know there may be other colleagues on the Subcommittee who wish to submit questions, so the hearing record will remain open for two weeks until March 15, 2024.

Any Senators who would like to submit questions for the record should do so by March 15, 2024. We ask that your responses be re-

turned to the Committee quickly, as possible, and in no case later than two weeks after receipt.

And with that, this concludes today's hearing. Thank you all for being here.

[Whereupon, at 12:20 a.m. CST, the hearing was adjourned.]

