

Press Statement 07-001

Coast Guard Reauthorization Bill Addresses Key Objectives of U.S. Arctic Research Commission 2007 Goals Report

From U.S. Arctic Research Commission Chair, Mead Treadwell

July 31, 2007

The U.S. Arctic Research Commission (USARC) issues this statement in support of the Coast Guard Reauthorization Bill recently introduced by Ted Stevens (R-Alaska), Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation and Committee Chairman Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii).

Several items in this bill are responsive to the Commission's Summary Report on Goals and Objectives for Arctic Research 2007, delivered to the White House and Congress earlier this year. In that report, USARC called for an assessment of Arctic research infrastructure needs, research into oil spills in ice-covered waters, and appropriate investment in new research platforms, including icebreakers, and forward basing to support the nation's Arctic research programs.

"From the research community's point of view," said Mead Treadwell, USARC Chair, "these measures represent tremendous, needed improvements to the Coast Guard's Arctic capability. For research on many issues, from climate change to mapping new territory for the United States, icebreakers are essential to understand the Arctic Ocean.

"The Arctic is much more accessible today, and will become even more so in the future," Treadwell added. "Experts advising the Commission have found that our nation will need the same search and rescue, environmental protection, waterway maintenance, subsistence and commercial fisheries support and law enforcement capabilities in the Arctic that the Coast Guard provides in our nation's other waterways."

The \$8.7 billion reauthorization bill would constitute a six percent increase in the Coast Guard's operating budget, and includes \$998 million for renovations to Coast Guard facilities as well as acquisition of new vessels and aircraft. The bill includes \$100 million to operate and maintain the nation's three existing polar icebreakers, including two heavy "polar class" ships, the Polar Sea and the Polar Star, nearing the end of their useful lives. The bill authorizes the Coast Guard to proceed with plans to construct two new vessels.

Long-sought risk assessments for oil spills in the Aleutian Islands/southern Bering Sea region are included in the bill, as well as an increase in endowment funding for the nation's long-term Arctic/sub-Arctic oil spill research program, conducted by the Prince William Sound Science Center's Oil Spill Recovery Institute.

Over the past five years, USARC has worked with the Congress and the National Academies to produce an assessment of U.S. polar icebreaker research needs. The Commission also helped to establish the Arctic Icebreaker Coordinating Committee in the University-National Oceanographic Laboratory System (UNOLS) so that scarce icebreaker time can be allocated among researchers in an efficient, coordinated

manner.

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Read the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
press release at [http://commerce.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?
FuseAction=PressReleases.Detail&PressRelease_id=248900&Month=7&Year=2007](http://commerce.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.Detail&PressRelease_id=248900&Month=7&Year=2007)

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USARC was established by the Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984. USARC's principal duties are to develop and recommend an integrated national Arctic research policy and to assist in establishing a national Arctic research program plan to implement the policy. Commissioners also facilitate cooperation between the Federal government, state and local governments, and other nations with respect to Arctic research, both basic and applied. Arctic research is conducted by 15 agencies of the United States government and is coordinated by the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee (IARPC) chaired by the Director of the National Science Foundation.