

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 19, 2019

Admiral Karl L. Schultz  
Commandant  
U.S. Coast Guard  
2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20593

Dear Admiral Schultz:

As you know, our foreign adversaries continue to invest heavily in dominating commercial and defense activities in Arctic waterways. To boost national strategy capabilities to counter these efforts, it is imperative for the United States to bring its new class of heavy polar icebreakers online as soon as possible. As such, we write to ask that the Coast Guard maintain the polar icebreaker program timeline to ensure delivery of new Polar Security Cutters by 2023.

As the world changes, new routes provide unprecedented access to once impassable waters allowing fishermen, cruise lines, merchant ship, and navy vessels to push further into the Arctic Circle. Nine of the Coast Guard's eleven statutory missions relate to the Arctic and require icebreaking abilities.

Within the last decade, Coast Guard studies have uncovered identified gaps in its ability to support and conduct Arctic missions. More recently, the Coast Guard established the need for up to three heavy polar icebreakers and three medium polar icebreakers to sufficiently meet current, as well as future, mission demands.

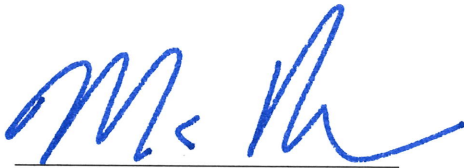
Without these strategic assets, the Coast Guard will be unable to fulfill all of its mission requirements, including agency support for the Department of Defense, the Department of State, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The United States has not commissioned a new heavy icebreaker in over forty years. Decades of looking past the vital importance of the Arctic has left our nation with only a single vessel of this class which is drastically beyond its service life. By contrast, all other nations laying territorial claims in the Arctic Circle each sustain a healthy fleet of icebreakers. This advantage may one day permit some of these nations to prevent the United States from accessing Arctic routes during a conflict, thus denying American commercial and national security vessels from transiting those waters.

While the United States' icebreaking capabilities have remained stagnant, Russia and China continue to advance policies and infuse resources into capitalizing the Arctic, including through the construction of additional icebreakers and intensifying economic relations across the region. China, in particular, without any Arctic borders, is following through with serious aspirations to fulfill its unsubstantiated claims to the region as a self-described "near-Arctic state."

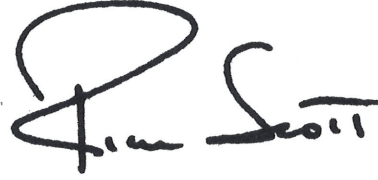
The United States can no longer afford to ignore the Arctic and must recognize the vital role icebreakers play in meeting the strategic challenges posed by near-peer competitors. We must work together to implement a comprehensive strategy to procure the necessary fleet of icebreakers to ensure the U.S. is able to defend itself and its allies, and maintain assured access to the Arctic Sea theater.

Sincerely,



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Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator



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Rick Scott  
U.S. Senator