

Coast Guard commander urges treaty ratification

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JUNEAU — The departing commander of the Coast Guard's 17th District, which includes Alaska, said the U.S. must ratify the Law of the Sea treaty to ensure access to and control over a rich oil and mineral bed that is getting attention from China.

Rear Admiral Christopher Colvin said the U.S. would gain exclusive control of the ocean bottom up to 440 miles off the Alaska northern coast, according to KTOO-FM.

"That's important territory on the bottom," Colvin said. "It has oil, gas and minerals that will be very valuable."

The U.S. has exclusive control of 200 miles of ocean bed

off the coast, and Colvin said Chinese mineral exploration crews are working in the area that would turn over to U.S. control if it ratified the treaty.

"(The Chinese) have an icebreaker, they're building another icebreaker, the world's largest non-nuclear icebreaker to go along with the previous one," Colvin said. "They're doing scientific research probably for energy exploration because there's lots of energy on the Chukchi Plateau."

Colvin will be transferred in May to the Coast Guard's Pacific Area Command in Alameda, Calif., where he'll be second in command of Pacific operations.

The European Union and 160 nation states have ratified

the Law of the Sea treaty. The United States is one of 18 countries that have signed, but not ratified it.

The treaty, first put forward by the United Nations in 1982, would establish a governing system for the use of the ocean for military, transportation and mineral extraction purposes.

U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, who is pushing for ratification of the treaty, said she has faced questions that first surfaced during the administration of President Ronald Reagan concerning the U.S. ceding its sovereignty by ratifying the treaty.

"They ask, what does this do to America's sovereignty?" Murkowski said. "By failing to ratify the treaty, by failing to be at the table, we give up that

sovereignty ourselves."

Last week, Murkowski told the state Legislature she'll push for ratification of the Law of the Sea treaty this spring or summer. She said Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chair John Kerry and President Barack Obama are behind the measure, but it faces opposition in Congress.

Murkowski also asked U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano for an update on the Coast Guard's icebreaker fleet.

Obama's budget proposal calls for decommissioning the icebreaker the Polar Sea, which would leave the U.S. with only one icebreaker for the next two years — the Healy, which can't break heavy ice.