

United States Senator Lisa Murkowski

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Murkowski Speaks at Arctic Policy Roundtable at New York Council on Foreign Relations

NEW YORK - U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, helped lead a discussion on U.S. Arctic policy at a roundtable forum today at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York City. Also participating in the discussion was U.S. Sen. Mark Begich, D-Alaska, a number of Arctic policy experts and several Alaskans, including Mayor Edward Itta of the North Slope Borough. Following is a text of Sen. Murkowski's remarks as prepared for delivery:

"Good afternoon. It is my distinct pleasure to be back at the Council on Foreign Relations today to discuss one of my favorite subjects, the Arctic. As all of us in this room are aware, the United States is an Arctic nation because of Alaska. But, what does it mean to be an Arctic nation? I believe that the Federal Government is just waking up to this reality and we are frantically trying to define exactly what that distinction means. In my view, being an Arctic nation means that the United States has certain obligations and responsibilities in the region to the land, the water and the people. And we all need to help our nation understand what those are.

"The pace of change in the Arctic demands that greater attention be focused on the region. The implications of the dynamic changing Arctic for the residents and important U.S. security, economic, environmental, and political interests, depend on it.

"One of those responsibilities I spoke of is to have the necessary infrastructure in the region. I recently introduced legislation that directs the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security to study the feasibility, location and resource needs for an Arctic deep water port. This study will determine whether it is in the strategic interest of the United States, as I believe it is, to build a port and where it might be located. A deep water port would not only serve our military and Coast Guard needs, but as we develop our offshore oil and gas reserves and see more shipping, tourism and vessel traffic in the Arctic, a deep water port could provide valuable support. I will insure that the Navy and Coast Guard actively consult with the communities and leaders of the region, as well as the State of Alaska.

"As we all are keenly aware, while the Arctic is becoming more and more ice free in the summer months, Arctic ice is not going to completely disappear. One of the major challenges that we face is our aging ice breaker fleet. I was able to get an appropriation to refurbish the Polar Star last year, and the Coast Guard has embarked on a study to determine whether we need to rebuild or replace our aging polar class vessels, but no matter the result of the study, we must have the commitment of the Administration and Congress that ice breakers are a national priority. And I will do all I can to advocate that position.

"As you know, I am a strong proponent of ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The United States must ratify the treaty but we remain at a stalemate: the White House looks to the Senate to lead and the Senate waits for stronger support from the

Administration. As the only Arctic nation not a party to the treaty, failure to ratify continues to keep the United States at a disadvantage internationally and outside the process, without a seat at the table.

"Even though we are not a party to the Treaty, the United States is making progress on mapping our extended continental shelf. The results of Coast Guard ice breaker HEALY's hydrographic missions in the Arctic have been remarkable and I have supported this initiative with appropriations and legislation to authorize more funding. I was gratified to see the cooperation in the Beaufort between with the HEALY and the Canadian icebreaker the Louie St. Laurent. This is yet one example of international cooperation in the Arctic.






"While I was pleased that the United States released its long awaited Arctic Regional Policy in early 2009, implementation is still lagging. It may be necessary for Congress to step in and help move the process. While certain branches of the government, like the Navy and Coast Guard, are developing and implementing their portions of the policy, it is still not nearly to the degree I would like. Certainly other Arctic and non-Arctic nations are moving much more quickly to develop policies and support them, than we are.

"I believe we are at a very critical time in the Arctic. As many of us have identified, there are two paths we can go down in regards to international relations -- one is a path of competition and conflict, and the other is one of cooperation and diplomacy. This decision, and the direction it takes, will require vision and dynamic leadership, both at home and abroad. I believe the United States, as one of the most powerful Arctic nations, must step up and provide it.

"A changing Arctic brings risks and challenges to the environment and indigenous people of the region. But it also brings opportunity and awareness, and if we can work to identify and minimize the risks, and use the opportunities to better the lives of the people of the Arctic region, we can all prosper.

"Thank you and I look forward to a lively conversation this afternoon."

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