

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



Senator Cathy Giessel

Senate District N

Senate Joint Resolution 10 – Arctic: Policy, USCG, Arctic Council

Sponsor Statement

Updated March 15, 2013

The Arctic has emerged as a region where U.S. strategic, political, environmental, and economic interests are at stake. International interest in the area's resource potential and the navigation opportunities for decreasing shipping times over conventional shipping routes will undoubtedly make the Arctic the focus of significant international concern in the 21st century.

The U.S. interests at stake are of particular concern to Alaskans. International Arctic policy affects Alaskans uniquely compared to other Americans. Only by virtue of Alaska is the U.S. an Arctic nation, but interest exhibited at the federal level in Arctic affairs has not been strong enough to ensure all of Alaska's interests are met. Meanwhile, our competition is mobilizing. The Russians have a fleet of 17 state owned icebreakers, six of which are nuclear powered. In 2007, they ceremonially planted a Russian flag on the Arctic seabed and resumed strategic bomber flights over the Arctic. Russia also submitted a claim to the U.N. Convention to the Law of the Sea, asserting rights to an area the size of Germany, France, and Italy combined. The Canadians and Chinese are also increasing investment in Arctic assets.

One international opportunity we appreciate is the United States' engagement in the Arctic Council. This unique high-level forum of the eight Arctic states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States) and Arctic indigenous people, has become an increasingly important diplomatic forum. In May 2015, the U.S. will once again assume chairmanship of the Arctic Council and guide the Arctic affairs conversation. While the U.S.'s participation in the Arctic Council is critical, additional action is warranted to protect Alaska's interests.

The Northwest Passage, located along Alaska's northern coast and northern Canada, and the Northern Sea Route over northern Eurasia pass through the Bering Strait which will experience increasing sea traffic in the years to come. Should disaster strike, be it oil spills or mariners in distress, Alaska and the U.S. should be ready and able to respond. SJR 10 urges Congress to appropriate funding to build all necessary vessels and facilities for the expansion of the Coast Guard's Arctic operations and to project a strong American presence in our northern waters.

SJR 10 promotes Alaska's international interests, which are fundamentally American interests by urging Congress to take a leadership role in guiding international Arctic policy through our nation's diplomatic, military, and economic means.