

## Senate Hearing Illustrates Arctic Needs

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Senators Mary Landrieu (D-La) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) held a senate subcommittee hearing in an aircraft hanger at Air Station Kodiak regarding America's presence in the Arctic. Brianna Gibbs/KMXT photo

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Two U.S. senators crossed party lines Monday when they met to discuss the future of the arctic, and what it means for the country, and in particular, the United States Coast Guard. KMXT's Brianna Gibbs has more.

### Democratic Senator

Mary Landrieu was a few thousand miles away from her stomping grounds of Louisiana when she joined Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski in Kodiak. The two sat before a field hearing of local residents, Coast Guardsmen and an expert panel to address the future of the arctic, and what it means for the United States Coast Guard.

### Admiral

Robert J. Papp was a fitting panelist to kick off the discussion. As commandant of the entire U.S. Coast Guard, he spoke to what melting sea ice and expansion of industry in the arctic has done to the Coast Guard's already limited resources.

-- (Field Hearing 1 :44 "The good thing is there is a lot of interest in the arctic now. I think the work of this subcommittee, the two of you, some of the speaking engagements I've had are causing people to ask the questions now. And when I try to relate this to a landsman, someone from the interior of the country that doesn't quite understand, what I say is well think about if your city, or your county or your parish incorporated a new portion of land, or gained some additional space or area, but you never increased your police force, or you never increased your fire department. They would take on added responsibilities, added burdens, and they'd have to spread the existing resources a little bit thinner to accomplish the mission. ")

Murkowski and Landrieu said they were discouraged by the declining funds the nation has put toward protecting the coast, and said they were working together to change that. Murkowski focused on the need for ice breakers in the north, along with more law enforcement as fisheries expand northward and oil and gas exploration intensifies.

-- (Field Hearing 2 :43 "But I also recognize that we ask an extraordinary amount of the men and women who serve us. And we have an obligation to provide you with those assets that allow you to do the job, do it well, and do it safely so that you return home to your families. And I worry, I worry because that water big and deep and broad and many, many times dangerous. And whether you're on the sea, or the helo in the air plucking fishermen out of waves that are 20 feet high and gales that are blasting, we put you in harms way. And we've got an obligation to ensure that you have the assets to do what you do, so honorably.")

Landrieu, who serves as the Chair of the Homeland Security Appropriations subcommittee, is no stranger to coastal waters. While her home state of Louisiana is a far cry from the arctic, she said she is empathic to the state's fishing industry, and has the Coast Guard to thank for being first on the scene to natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina. But perhaps more so than anything, Landrieu said she can attest to the immense resources needed to pursue oil and gas drilling. She spoke from experience, too. After all, it was Louisiana that felt the greatest effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010.

-- (Field Hearing 3 :25 "It may be shocking, Senator, to think of this but 47,000 personnel and 7,000 vessels responded to that accident. We're sitting in the largest air base here and we only have 1,000 personnel. I don't think you have nearly 7,000 vessels anywhere close, and that response had to be done immediately. And I think the nation has to really come to grips with the exploration opportunities for oil and gas, the need of the nation to have our domestic resource, but the extra responsibility that comes with that to provide the vessels and the man power to take care of something that if in that situation, something went terribly wrong.")

The dire need for ice breaking vessels was a reoccurring topic during the hearing. Landrieu said the U.S. is an arctic nation, but one would not assume that if they considered the resources the Coast Guard is working with. Admiral Papp, who agreed, addressed the question of what is currently in operation.

-- (Field Hearing 4 :42 "So that will give us one heavy breaker, and one medium breaker, and that's my bridging strategy over the next decade until we get the new polar ice breaker build. And how much do those polar ice breakers cost approximately. We're estimating anywhere between \$800 million to \$1 billion, looking across the world at the price we see in other countries and what Canada is allocating to build their new icebreaker. And do you know how many Canada has, or how many Russia has or how many China has? I'd have to get back to you with the rough numbers. But they have more than we do? Absolutely.")

The field hearing was intended to provide testimony for the need of additional funds to the Coast Guard. The two senators are currently working on a bill that would allocate \$10.336 billion to the Coast Guard, \$282 million above president's request. Dr. Mark Myers, a researcher from the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, joined Admiral Papp on the panel, and provided testimony as to his research needs and discoveries in northern waters. Joining him was Merrick Burden, executive director of the Marine Conservation Alliance, and Bruce Harland, vice president of commercial services for Crowley Marine.

Once the hearing came to a close, both Murkowski and Landrieu said they had gained valuable information to support their bill, and shed light on the needs of Alaska for those far away in Washington D.C. They said the record would remain open until August 20, giving time to allow the community at large to testify about the topics discussed during the hearing.

Murkowski and Landrieu will continue their Alaskan visit in the coming days, visiting other communities that rely on the Coast Guard. In Kodiak, I'm Brianna Gibbs.

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