

February 25, 2015

Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell  
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell,

With the United States taking up the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council later this year, it is important that the Energy and Natural Resources Committee is holding a hearing on the Arctic. There are many topics that need to be discussed, and I would like to suggest a few that I am sure you are already well-acquainted with. As our climate has changed, no region has been impacted as significantly as the Arctic – the changing Arctic is a canary in the coal mine for our planet. Yet, with these changes come immense opportunity, challenge, and responsibility. New sea lanes are opening, energy resources are becoming accessible and national security challenges are emerging. These new possibilities bring with them profound implications for both the people of the region and global security.

As we assume the leadership of the Arctic Council, it is imperative that the United States develop a robust strategy for responding to changes in the Arctic. We have begun our leadership by designating the very capable Admiral Papp as our representative to the Arctic, but we now must make him an Ambassador. I hope that you will consider calling Admiral Papp as a witness at our hearing.

The shrinking sea ice in the Arctic is like the Mediterranean slowly being discovered – it is a large naval space with many bordering nations. Yet, now we have the international agreements and institutions to allow a peaceful exploration of this new space. This is why the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea must be discussed during our hearing. We cannot fully make claims to our rightful Arctic territory without acceding to this important treaty.

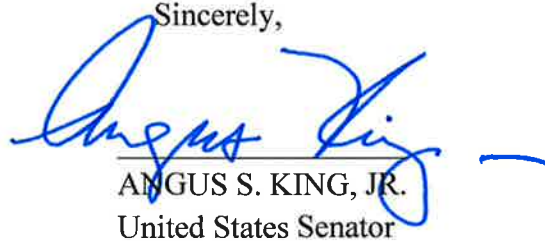
Secondly, I believe the committee should examine the need for long-lead investments in infrastructure. This includes the need for ice-breakers, as well as support infrastructure for responding to emergencies like an oil spill or trouble with a ship transiting the Arctic. Third, we should examine the unique challenges that Arctic shipping faces, from claims of ownership over international straits to the emission of black carbon that contributes to a climate feedback effect to inadequate charting. I am particularly interested in shipping as we now have an Icelandic shipping line, Eimskip, calling on Maine. Maine has already started looking North.

Fourth, it might be useful for the committee to examine how the United States and other Arctic nations can maintain their security interests in the Arctic without resorting to the military competition that is the norm in other regions of the world. The United States currently has strong bilateral relations with six of the seven other Arctic Council nations, with the exception being Russia. The committee should explore how and whether the United States can continue to work cooperatively with Russia on Arctic issues, even as other aspects of the bilateral relationship are under significant strain.

Finally, I hope that our hearing contains a robust discussion of the impact of changes on the people of the Arctic, whether they live in Alaska, Canada, Finland or other parts of the Arctic. They must not be left out of the discussion of mineral rights, cheaper and cleaner renewable energy, as well as climate impacts like sea level rise. Although the climatic changes make it seem that the Arctic is just being discovered, native people have been living there for thousands of year.

The changes in the Arctic can usher in a period of conflict or of cooperation. We must do our part to raise awareness of these changes and to make the long-term decisions and investments needed for a very different Arctic future. I hope that our hearing, in its witnesses and topics, will reflect that. While the committee does not have jurisdiction over every issue that needs to be examined, it still can serve as a pulpit to raise awareness of the changing Arctic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Angus King", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

ANGUS S. KING, JR.  
United States Senator