



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Strategic Competition in the Arctic

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The Arctic is a region of increasing importance to our efforts to protect the homeland. Democrats on the Homeland Security Committee held multiple hearings and briefings on security challenges in the Arctic when we were in the majority, and I am glad to see the current Majority continuing that focus.

We must continue to come together in a bipartisan fashion to ensure the challenges facing our Nation at our northernmost border receive the attention they deserve. Climate change and melting sea ice are opening Arctic waters to increased maritime activity, from shipping to fishing to tourism to offshore energy exploration. Global competitors including Russia and China are making significant investments to take full advantage of the changing circumstances in the region, and the U.S. must be ready to respond.

The Coast Guard's efforts to secure and protect the maritime domain are central to U.S. interests in the Arctic and demand Congress' attention. The Coast Guard's icebreaking capabilities are sorely lacking, making it difficult for the Coast Guard to maintain necessary presence in the region. With Congress' support, the Coast Guard has begun making historic investments in the Polar Security Cutter program to help make up for decades of negligence. This will be a long-term effort, so Congress must continue making such investments and ensure shipbuilding efforts stay on budget and meet critical deadlines.

The United States must also strategize for the coming years and decades in the Arctic, since we know that changes in the region will only continue to accelerate. To that end, the Biden-Harris Administration's *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*, published last October, is a huge step in the right direction. The Strategy places appropriate focus on climate change and environmental protection, as well as on security. Plans for the Arctic must account for the severity of changes to sea ice and warming temperatures, which can only be understood by following the science on climate change. Importantly, the Strategy also highlights the need for consultation and coordination with indigenous communities, as well as the need for international cooperation and governance.

The Coast Guard cannot address the challenges in the Arctic on its own and must work hand-in-hand with Alaskan native tribes and communities and international allies and partners. I thank today's witnesses for sharing their expertise about homeland security priorities in the Arctic and what Congress can do to support the Coast Guard and the rest of the Federal government in their efforts.

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