



COMMITTEE *ON* HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Transportation & Maritime Security Subcommittee Ranking Member Shri Thanedar (D-MI)

Examining the Polar Security Cutter: An Update on Coast Guard Acquisitions

December 18, 2024

Today's hearing follows the hearing this subcommittee held in May to examine the Coast Guard's shipbuilding efforts and other acquisition programs. At that hearing, we discussed the importance of the Arctic region to U.S. interests.

In the Arctic, a changing climate and melting ice caps have allowed for increased shipping, energy exploration, economic competition, and power projection. Russia and China have amplified their presence in the region, including through joint military exercises.

Yet the Coast Guard has been challenged to maintain a regular presence in the Arctic due to a lack of modern icebreakers. The Coast Guard has only one heavy icebreaker, the Polar Star, and one medium icebreaker, the Healy.

The Coast Guard continues to carry out commendable projects to extend the service life of these cutters, but nevertheless, they are aging and insufficient to meet the Coast Guard's long-term needs.

In 2016, the Coast Guard and the U.S. Navy jointly established the Polar Security Cutter, or PSC, program to begin the process of acquiring American-made heavy icebreakers. In 2019, the Coast Guard awarded a contract for the initial PSC, to be delivered in late 2024. Yet here we are in late 2024, and the Coast Guard is only now beginning construction of the cutter.

We understand some of the reasons for the delay, from underestimating the complexity of the ship design, to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and impacts on the supply chain. Some of these factors were under the Coast Guard's control, and some were not.

Going forward, the key is for the Coast Guard to learn from the past and establish reasonable schedule and cost estimates for the PSC program—and then stick to them. Doing so will allow Congress to plan for the budgetary demands of the PSC program and continue our bipartisan support.

I look forward to receiving an update from Vice Admiral Allan today on the next phase of the PSC program. I also look forward to hearing more details on the Coast Guard's plans for the commercially available icebreaker it recently acquired to help fill ice-breaking needs while we await the delivery of the first PSC.

The Coast Guard's mission in the Arctic is critical, and we must ensure the Service develops the capabilities it needs.

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