

**Statement of  
The Honorable James L. Oberstar  
Subcommittee on the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation  
Hearing On  
“Coast Guard Icebreaking”  
July 16, 2008**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for scheduling today's hearing to discuss Coast Guard Icebreaking and the Coast Guard's mission in the Arctic. I want to thank Congressman Stupak for joining us today and look forward to his testimony.

Ice breaking has been around since the early 1800's. The Coast Guard received the authority to conduct domestic icebreaking operations when President Roosevelt issued Executive Order No. 7521 in December 1936.

In the Great Lakes, as much as 200 million tons of cargo is moved on the marine highway. Approximately 63 U.S. Flag vessels transport over 115 million tons of cargo each year to include iron ore, limestone and coal.

The Coast Guard provides ice breaking services to the Great Lakes with the cutter Mackinaw, five 140 foot ice breaking tugs and two 225 foot buoy tenders. Last year, due to the lack of Coast Guard resources and capability to break ice in the region, three vessels in the Great Lakes sustained \$1.3 million in damages. This is an issue that needs to be discussed and explored so events like this do not happen in the future.

Like many of the Coast Guard's assets, 22 vessels in their domestic icebreaking fleet that are at or past their designed service lives. The two Polar Class vessels have reached their service lives and the cutter Healy is pretty much dedicated to direct mission tasking of other agencies.

Today, we are looking at the needs of the polar mission and whether or not there are adequate resources to conduct the mission effectively. I want to thank Admiral Allen for being here today to testify on the Coast Guard's ice breaking fleet and possible expanded mission in the Arctic. I want to thank our witnesses for being here today and look forward to your testimony. Chairman Cummings, I look forward to working with you and Ranking Members Mica and LaTourette during this hearing.