

Senator Lisa Murkowski

CSIS – Arctic Forum

Wednesday, July 23, 2008

- Thank you for the invitation to speak to you about one of my favorite topics, the Arctic. The United States has been an Arctic nation since the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867. While I am fairly confident that each of you were already aware of this, the challenge is getting the general public to understand not only that the United States has land in the Arctic, but this area is critically important for many reasons.

- The heightened focus on the Arctic of late is primarily due to the impacts of climate change and the fact that these changes are occurring at an unprecedented rate in this region. This makes the Arctic the most vital place to be studying how climate change can affect the entire planet.

- This past summer we saw the Northwest Passage completely ice free for the first time in recorded history. Canada responded by announcing plans for an Arctic military training facility and deep-water port on the Northwest Passage. They followed that

up by calling for the construction of 6 to 8 ice strengthened patrol boats, to be in operation by 2014, to assert their sovereignty claim in the Arctic.

- In an expedition some have compared to the United States planting a flag on the moon, a Russian-led team descended 13,000 feet to the seabed on August 2 of last year and planted a Russian flag directly on the North Pole.
- This intense interest in claiming Arctic territory is primarily driven by the quest for Arctic resources. Until recently, the resources of the Arctic were deemed to be too difficult and expensive to develop. But with increasing access and high energy prices, the Arctic's wealth, which is conservatively estimated to contain up to 25% of the world's remaining oil and gas reserves, including over 100 billion barrels of oil, is now being explored and developed at an unprecedented rate.
- Russia is turning its eye to the Arctic's vast energy reserves as they are building the first offshore oil rig that can withstand temperatures as low as minus 50 degrees Celsius and heavy

pack ice. They are also reducing taxes and bureaucratic hurdles in order to encourage new oil development in the Arctic.

- Maritime activities relating to the transportation of goods, oil and gas, tourism and research will surely increase as access to the Arctic Ocean increases. Work is underway to determine the way forward in the development of a shipping regime through the Northern Sea Route, Northwest Passage, and even directly over the pole.
- The dramatic retreat of Arctic sea ice has focused much attention on the development of these routes, but in order to be viable options to the Suez and Panama canals, the need for a comprehensive plan addressing safety, security, navigation, environmental protection, vessel standards and economics must be developed and in place.
- The Arctic is truly the last frontier. One of the few places on earth where all the borders aren't drawn on the map yet and some of those that are, are disputed. A recent article in Parade magazine entitled, “ The Race to Own the Arctic”, will certainly bring more attention to the region, given its readership of

approximately 70 million Americans. But the title of the article emphasizes the competition underway to own the resources by extending continental shelf claims. While the anticipated claims do overlap in many cases, there exists an opportunity to address these claims and many of the other key issues in the Arctic, cooperatively and multi-laterally.

- On May 28th, representatives of the 5 coastal states bordering the Arctic-Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States met in Ilulissat (Ill-you-lis-at), Greenland, and adopted a declaration of cooperation in the Arctic. The representatives recognized the undeniable uniqueness of the region and the dramatic changes occurring there, with the potential for profound effects on the environment and indigenous people of the region.

- The Ilulissat Declaration recognizes the responsibilities of the Arctic nations to be good stewards and to work together to protect the fragile Arctic ecosystem. The Arctic is a marine environment surrounded by continents and a shipping disaster or oil spill would not just effect the local area, but could jeopardize the entire Arctic ecosystem and cause irreversible damage.

- But here in the United States, we are not able to make a claim until we ratify the Convention. There are some who do not see the point in joining the rest of the world in ratifying the treaty.

They say that the U.S. already enjoys the benefits of the Treaty even though we are not a member and that by not becoming a party to the Treaty, we can pick and choose which sections we abide by, while not subjecting our actions to international review.

- But I believe it is very important for the United States to be a party to this Treaty and be a player in the process, rather than an outsider hoping our interests are not damaged. Accession to the Convention would give current and future administrations both enhanced credibility and leverage in calling upon other nations to meet Convention responsibilities. Given the support for the Treaty by Arctic nations and the drive to develop natural resources, the Treaty will also provide the environmental framework to develop these resources while minimizing environmental impacts.

- According to the U.S. Arctic Research Commission, if the United States were to become a party to the Treaty, we could lay claim to an area in the Arctic of about 450,000 square kilometers-or approximately the size of California. But if we do not become a party to the Treaty, our opportunity to make this claim, and have the international community respect it,

diminishes considerably-as does our ability to prevent claims like Russia's from coming to fruition.

- The Administration has shown strong leadership in being a party to the Ilulissat Declaration and our intentions to work cooperatively with the other Arctic nations. It is time for the United States Senate to show the leadership to ratify the treaty.
- There are a number of other areas where the United States is leading the way in the Arctic. Our science budget for Arctic research is the most of any country and through efforts like the International Polar Year, American scientists are working on well over 100 projects with scientists from around the world. It is my hope that IPY will usher in a new era of scientific cooperation and collaboration in the Arctic.
- Congress recently passed a resolution, which the President signed into law, to develop an international fisheries regime for the Arctic. Alaska, like Norway and Iceland, has been very successful in managing our fisheries and there is every reason to believe that this will continue with a very precautionary approach in the Arctic. In fact, the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council, the advisory body for the federal fisheries

off of Alaska, proactively closed all fisheries in the Arctic until an assessment of the fish stocks could be made and a management plan developed.

- Although the United States is a world leader in some facets of the Arctic, there are many others areas that the question must be asked: Is the United States a leader in addressing climate change? For the first time the Senate started the legislative debate on the issue of climate change. We are far from an end-game, but movement is afoot. What about sustainable energy development? Alternative energy? Environmental protection? We need to be leaders in each of these areas.

- We have an incredible opportunity to develop an international policy and cooperative regime in the Arctic. With such a fragile ecosystem, however, our first effort may be our last chance to get it right. We sit on the edge of the precipice, with continued change projected to occur whether we are prepared or not. How we address this challenge and adapt in the Arctic will be an example for the rest of the world.

- The Ilulissat Declaration gives us hope that international cooperation among Arctic nations is possible and by working

together to develop a framework for governing the region, we can mutually provide for its' protection and preservation.

- We will only succeed in the Arctic if it is a commitment that all nations share and undertake together. The future of the Arctic depends on it. Thank you.

###