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STATE OF ALASKA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
JUNEAU

March 18, 2008

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write in support of new icebreakers for the U.S. Coast Guard. The nation's only two icebreakers built to handle heavy sea ice are more than 30 years old and nearing the end of their service lives. Yet at the same time as our icebreakers are hobbled by years of hard service and lack of maintenance funds, more freighters and cruise ships than ever before are traveling through the Arctic — with many more on the way to U.S. waters. Oil and gas explorers are spending billions of dollars in the Arctic to find the energy resources our nation needs to power its homes and businesses. Similar commercial work is under way on both sides of the U.S. Arctic borders, moving ahead while our nation remains tied up at the dock.

All the while our country needs more access and more research into the science of climate change and its effects, especially in remote polar waters. For the sake of commerce, our energy and national security, and to protect our residents and resources, it's time for the United States to build a pair of new polar icebreakers.

The U.S. Coast Guard's two major icebreakers — the Polar Sea and Polar Star — are in poor shape and the United States has become a poor cousin to Russia and Norway, which recognize the high importance of dependable access to polar waters. Yes, committing to design and construction of new icebreakers is a costly endeavor, but the United States cannot afford to ignore its Arctic coastline, oil and gas resources, and national security.

The state of Alaska is not alone in this quest. The United States Arctic Research Commission is calling for new icebreakers, as is the National Academy of Sciences. In a report last year to Congress, the National Academy stated the case very well: "The U.S. icebreaking capacity is now at risk of being unable to support national interests in the north and south. Deferred long-term maintenance and failure to execute a plan for replacement or refurbishment of the nation's icebreaking ships have placed national interests in the polar regions at risk."

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Possible ratification of the Law of the Sea Treaty will require the United States to embark on an extensive effort to collect data to prove its claims to polar waters and seabeds, and to defend against excessive claims by other nations. Mapping the outer continental shelf off Alaska is an essential piece of that effort, one that cannot be done in a safe and timely manner without dependable icebreakers on the job. The best way to get that data to defend our national interests is with two new polar-class icebreakers. To ignore that responsibility could be very costly to the future of our country.

A more immediate issue is the rapid and strong growth in Arctic shipping and tourism. Retreating sea ice is opening up shorter shipping routes through northern waters. The famed Northwest Passage is becoming a reality, and the Coast Guard needs to be vigilant in patrolling and protecting our coastline.

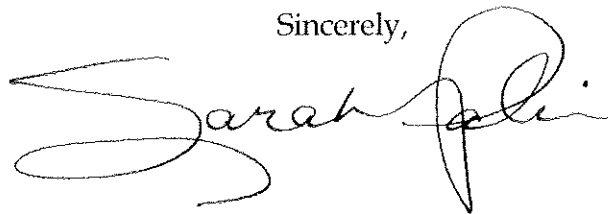
As retreating sea ice opens up new shipping lanes, it also opens up new problems. "(It) has enormous economic implications, and commerce is going to push this ecological zone to the limit," Rear Admiral Timothy McGee, head of the U.S. Navy's Meteorology and Oceanography Command, said in a recent Reuters interview.

But the Coast Guard cannot do its job with 32-year-old ships shut down for repairs. With steadily growing freighter and cruise traffic comes the risk of accidents and pollution and the need for search and rescue missions. It is essential that our nation have available modern icebreakers to respond to whatever emergency may arise.

Everything points to the need for an expanded U.S. presence in the polar regions, not less. Everything points to the need for new icebreakers to show and enforce that presence.

Please let me know if I can help in this endeavor. The Coast Guard needs the ships to do its job.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah Palin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "S" and a distinct "P" at the end.

Sarah Palin
Governor
State of Alaska

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cc: Jim Nussle, Director, U.S. Office of Management and Budget
The Honorable Condoleezza Rice, Secretary, U.S. Department of State
The Honorable Michael Chertoff, Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland
Security
The Honorable Robert Gates, Secretary, U.S. Department of Defense
Admiral Thad W. Allen, Commandant, United States Coast Guard
The Honorable Ted Stevens, United States Senator
The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, United States Senator
The Honorable Don Young, United States Representative
John Katz, Director, State and Federal Relations, Office of the Governor