

Statement for the Record

The Honorable Sean Parnell

Governor  
State of Alaska

Before the  
United States Senate  
Subcommittee on Homeland Security Appropriations

“The Strategic Importance of the Arctic in U.S. Policy”

August 20, 2009  
Anchorage, Alaska

**Introduction**

Thank you, Senator Murkowski, for this opportunity to address the Homeland Security Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee on one of the greatest challenges facing the Nation and the State of Alaska – the changing Arctic and the national policies necessary for its understanding, its protection, and its responsible development.

Before I begin my remarks, Madam Chair, I would like to take a few moments to recognize and thank Admiral Thad Allen, Commandant of the United States Coast Guard, and all the members of the Coast Guard for their bravery and hard work in Alaska.

Just this week, the Coast Guard helped save the lives of nine people in Alaska. A Coast Guard helicopter found two missing adults and a child near Ketchikan. With help from Alaska State Troopers, family and friends, the Coast Guard rescued another six people when a 20-foot pleasure boat overturned at Tee Harbor near Juneau. Unfortunately, one person lost their life in that incident. My thoughts and prayers are with his family, and we deeply appreciate the men and women who keep America’s coastlines safe and secure.

As you know Senator Murkowski, Alaska is America’s Arctic – it’s our home, our history, our heritage, and our future. And Alaska is the only national link to the Arctic and the only state that shares a border with two other Arctic nations. Arctic policies affect every state and every citizen – Alaskans most of all, not just because of our strategic location on the globe, but because of what we have to offer. The Arctic’s abundant resources – human and natural – and our strategic location for national security demand our attention. The people of Alaska understand and eagerly accept our role in the examination and development of national Arctic policy.

We worked closely with the previous Administration on national and homeland security directives outlining broad policies on the Arctic. We hope to continue that collaboration with this Administration and Congress.

Today, I present Alaska’s view of U.S. Arctic policies in five areas: resources, national and homeland security, science, and foreign policy. In the Arctic, these policies are inextricably linked. And, while I describe these issues individually, it is vital that this committee and the Administration understand and act on them jointly. Domestic energy supplies support national and homeland security. Security enables development and protects the environment. Foreign policy enables international participation in scientific research. This must all be discussed in the context of climate change and how Alaska is adapting in light of Arctic policy.

## **Resources**

Let me begin by focusing on Alaska's resources – most of all, our human resources: Alaska's people. Make no mistake, Alaskans have been adapting for years. Changes in the Arctic affect us directly, every day. No one is more vested in Arctic policy than the people who subsist from the land – hunting, fishing and gathering, not just for food, but for the survival of their culture. Collaboration with our Arctic residents and local governments is a must. Alaskans understand the need for balance.

Any conversation about the Arctic must also include Alaska's natural resources – coal, gold, zinc, silver, copper, natural gas and oil. These resources make the Arctic vital to American energy security. Alaska is America's Arctic energy breadbasket. We have traditional and renewable sources of energy in staggering volumes here. Alaska can play an even greater role in reducing the amount of oil and gas we import from abroad. And we can be America's test-bed for renewable and alternative energy sources.

The onshore Arctic areas, such as the NPR-A and the coastal plain of ANWR, hold great promise.

Alaska is home to the Trans Alaska Pipeline System, which carries 685,000 barrels of oil a day to the lower 48 states. This major supply of oil is key to our national energy security.

Offshore Alaska ... the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas can be explored safely in the near-term, producing oil and gas for decades. Without these known, traditional sources of energy, we risk higher cost energy, higher taxes, and greater dependence on foreign oil. We can do this on our own soil. Let us not be led down the easy path to investing America's foreign aid dollars in exploration abroad. Let's keep it here – where Americans can get the jobs, and where environmental laws safeguard our land, seas, and wildlife.

Putting the brakes on domestic energy production does not prevent global warming or end threats to species. Instead, delaying responsible exploration and development increases the problem by shifting resource extraction to less environmentally preferred fuels and locations.

Turning to cleaner fuels, the State of Alaska is also pursuing the construction of a pipeline to bring the North Slope's abundant, clean natural gas to American markets. We have two competing private sector groups working diligently to permit a natural gas pipeline that can deliver 4.5 billion cubic feet of natural gas a day to the continental United States. Again, if we can turn on the supply of clean, American natural gas – from Alaska – we will reduce our dependence on imports and bring less expensive energy to homes across America.

Unfortunately, current language in proposed climate change legislation would likely make the project uneconomic and would lead to the use of higher cost fuel sources before technology catches up.

Alaska remains fully committed to alternative and renewable energy, as well. This is the place to field test every alternative. From wind turbines to hydro-electric, to chip-fired systems that burn wood for fuel – Alaska is America's alternative energy center.

I am confident that together we can bring traditional, renewable and alternative energy to market and increase Alaska's contribution toward our nation's energy independence for years to come.

## **Homeland Security**

Alaska is America's Arctic Guardian. Our strategic location, resources and people compel strong funding for homeland security. The Department of Homeland Security and its agencies have been strong partners in providing for the safety and security of Alaskans and our economy.

Melting sea ice and increased military and commercial activity require a greater Coast Guard presence. The Coast Guard needs to move north and improve its capability — our heavy ice-class icebreakers are on their last legs. To provide homeland security the Coast Guard must have new Arctic-class icebreakers equipped for search and rescue missions, border protection, law enforcement, fisheries enforcement, infrastructure and environmental protection.

Support for funding for those icebreakers is up to this committee. We need to fund a new Coast Guard duty station or port on Alaska's coast between Nome and Barrow to meet the new challenges of the Arctic.

The Coast Guard needs to keep the promise of the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 and establish a research program for the Arctic. With information in hand, we can continue to work with the Coast Guard to improve our ability to prevent and respond to oil spills in the region.

In addition, the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency must have authority to act on disasters we can predict, not just those looming around the corner or the one we currently face. In western and northern Alaska, the sea ice no longer shields the coast from fall storms. The resulting erosion threatens the sustainability of some communities. The federal law was not written with such hazards in mind and does not provide the large-scale response these small communities need.

Exploration and development will bring more coastal and maritime infrastructure, such as ports, repair facilities, fuel depots, pipelines, and transportation. These assets will need effective, enforceable security buffer zones to ensure continuity under all hazards.

### **National Security**

As the summer ice retreats, opportunities for commerce, tourism and transportation advance. Already we see more mineral, oil and gas exploration – more vessel traffic and science missions. As we have seen throughout the world's oceans, increased maritime traffic elevates both risks and threats. Currently, the North Slope Borough and oil and gas producers on the slope fill much of that void. We need the federal government to step in. We can no longer assume that the threat from the north to our oil production fields is not real. We can no longer assume that the Arctic is an impenetrable barrier.

The United States must increase national focus on the Arctic, add resources to collect scientific data, and increase Coast Guard presence to address these new challenges and opportunities. This will provide the ability to develop the American Arctic's vast natural resources and is critical for the protection of strategic national infrastructure and assets.

Alaska's strategic position as the northern crossroads also places us squarely in line between potential adversaries and the rest of the United States. I urge the Congress to support the ground-based missile defense system in Alaska and reconsider the proposal to scale back the placement of interceptors at Fort Greely. We play a critical role in national security and in the security of American allies.

### **Science**

Despite centuries of exploration and study, much about the Arctic remains a mystery. Standard weather and climate models are not sufficient for understanding and predicting trends and patterns. New models require fresh data and up-to-date research.

The State of Alaska strongly supports the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and its initiatives to improve its observations and research across the Arctic and to develop innovative forecasting models for next week's weather and next century's climate.

I encourage scientific collaboration among the academic world, the Arctic nations, and non-governmental organizations to improve our understanding of fisheries, marine mammals, land animals and vegetation in the Arctic ecosystem. This research must be open and rigorous.

The State continues its support of the use of unmanned aerial systems for Arctic operations and research. The Alaska Aerospace Development Corporation and NOAA are working on a plan for how best to make that happen. The technology exists; the stakeholders are ready; but the current regulations are inflexible and outdated.

And the Arctic, literally, needs to be put on the map. Scientific research and economic exploration are set back by low-quality, decades-old mapping data. There is no accurate baseline to measure change, to

identify trends and patterns, or to predict potential outcomes. We need high-quality maps of the Arctic – both land and sea. Funding for such priorities should not be based on population density, but instead on current and future strategic economic and environmental values.

### **Foreign Policy**

For much of its history, the Arctic has been both ungoverned and ungovernable. Even as the eight Arctic nations have increased economic activity, the Arctic climate has impeded economic and social development, transportation, and research. That era must end.

I strongly urge the Senate to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Once ratified, the treaty will allow us to claim jurisdiction over the offshore continental shelf behind the 200-mile limit. U.S. boundaries could grow into areas that may hold large deposits of oil, natural gas and other resources. Russia, Canada, Denmark, and Norway have claims to Arctic territory under the auspices of the Law of the Sea. Without ratification, the U.S. cannot fully participate in adjudication of these claims.

### **Climate change**

Alaskans have extremely close ties to the land and the sea and are sensitive to their subtleties and variability. The changes in the Arctic ice – their timing, extent, and nature – give us cause for concern.

To define and address these concerns, Governor Palin formed the Climate Change Subcabinet to respond to immediate needs in rural villages, plan for the long term and determine research needs. The subcabinet has turned recommendation into action. We're now working on coastline stabilization, emergency and evacuation planning, hazard mitigation planning, training and exercises for the communities most in need.

The climate change strategy is in the final stages and will be presented to me this fall. We've had noteworthy partnerships with several federal agencies in this process, and we look forward to continued work with the federal government as we address climate change.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I applaud you, Senator Murkowski, on bringing to Alaska this hearing on the strategic importance of the Arctic in U.S. policy. These policies, whether long-standing or emerging, will have a profound effect on the nation and on Alaska for generations. We must take a balanced approach to protect our food sources, thousands of jobs and the energy security provided by Alaska's oil and mineral development.

Alaska and the U.S. government share a policy that is balanced and recognizes the diversity the Arctic offers. And it highlights the Arctic's unique characteristics and consequent need for unique treatment.

I urge the Congress and the federal Administration to continue the good work on Arctic policies and encourage the development of a National Arctic Doctrine that includes all stakeholders in the future of the Arctic. Alaska will participate and Alaska will contribute. We are eager to work with Congress to manage all our resources.

On taking office last month, I asked Alaskans and myself several questions: In the next 50 years, will Alaska move forward, or will time pass us by? Will each of us be a vital player, or will we stay on the bench? Will we just survive, or will we choose to thrive?

Today Alaskans join me in stating that our state – and our nation – must not be idle and passive; that we must not drift; that we must choose our destiny and work hard to achieve it.

The Arctic is our future. We choose to move forward, and we choose to thrive.

Thank you for your leadership and your service to our great State and to our Nation.