

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 2, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

President Biden,

We write to express our support for a robust, thoughtful, and timely implementation of the Icebreaker Collaboration Effort, or ICE Pact, announced at the Washington NATO summit in July. This trilateral partnership with Canada and Finland has great potential to deepen cooperation with key allies, to strengthen our domestic shipbuilding industry and workforce, and to advance U.S. and allied security interests and international law in the Arctic and polar regions. We hope to work with your Administration to ensure the entire federal government is organized behind maximizing the success of ICE Pact.

As areas increasingly impacted by mounting Russian and Chinese activity, the Arctic and Antarctic regions' strategic importance to the United States is growing. Warming temperatures are significantly altering the physical landscapes at the North and South Poles, opening new maritime lanes for international traffic, impacting seasons for recreational travel, and disrupting native wildlife habitats.

In response to the changing physical environment and growing international pressure following its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has significantly built up its military footprint in the Arctic and re-opened several Soviet-era military bases. China, often in close coordination with Russia, has made critical investments to enable exploitation of natural resources above the Arctic Circle. In 2018, China put forth its own ambitious Arctic Policy and subsequently referenced the Arctic in its Five-Year Plan released in 2021 for the first time. Chinese fishing fleets have also repeatedly engaged in illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing off the coast of Alaska, which must be deterred to preserve local ecosystems critical to domestic communities.

In this moment of geopolitical upheaval, it is critical for the United States and our allies to be proactive in rising together to meet difficult challenges in the Arctic and Antarctic. Year-round presence and situational awareness in these areas is critical to enforcing the rules-based order in the high-latitudes, protecting freedom of navigation, and ensuring that natural resource extraction abides by environmental rules and regulations. A reliable icebreaker fleet operated by the U.S. and our allies is critical to achieving these strategic objectives, especially in the Arctic Circle.

We welcome initial steps taken by your Administration and NATO to address these challenges and pressing needs. The Department of Defense's 2024 Arctic Strategy laid out a useful roadmap for enhancing U.S. and allied capabilities and preserving stability in the Arctic region – and was conveniently released just after Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO brought 7 of 8 Arctic

countries into the Alliance. ICE Pact was then rolled out on July 11, 2024, and built on that strategy, seizing the new opportunities brought by NATO's enhanced Arctic presence and tapping into the expertise of our partners.

ICE Pact has the potential to build upon this foundation and become a key trilateral partnership between the United States, Canada, and Finland that deepens collaboration on national security matters in the polar and Arctic regions. As laid out in its announcement, the Pact's central focus will be a joint effort to build top-of-the-line polar icebreakers by pooling and sharing expertise. The partnership aims to strengthen the shipbuilding industry of each country and to generate good jobs at shipyards and related businesses all over, while meeting key national security needs in which the United States and NATO allies have been lagging. According to U.S. Coast Guard data, Russia currently possesses 36 government-owned and operated icebreakers while China – despite not being an Arctic nation – has a fleet of four. By comparison, the United States has just two operational polar icebreakers and has been far too slow in advancing our polar icebreaker recapitalization. Without sufficient icebreaker capacity, the U.S. Coast Guard is often forced to divert assets needed elsewhere to meet Arctic mission needs.

By combining American industrial strength with the icebreaker design and shipbuilding experience of Finnish and Canadian partners, we see great potential in ICE Pact to bolster international collaboration in the Arctic and Antarctic broadly. The Pact holds promise for better meeting U.S. and NATO maritime security needs in the Arctic and polar regions, especially as efforts to produce the Polar Security Cutter fleet continue. Increased NATO icebreaker presence has the potential to free up maritime assets assigned to patrols near the Arctic and allow U.S. cutters and ships to support additional missions below the Arctic Circle – including scientific research, search and rescue, and protection of maritime resources. If executed properly, the Pact will allow us to avoid being outpaced by foreign adversaries in icebreaker capabilities, and to enhance the industrial, scientific, and maritime heft of the United States and our allies.

As work is underway with Canadian and Finnish counterparts to flesh out the Pact's details, we want to ensure the initiative achieves its fullest potential – with strong coordination across the U.S. federal government. To this end, we respectfully request responses to the following questions no later than 45 days from today to inform Congress's work on related authorization and funding issues:

1. What is the Pact's anticipated long-term impact to U.S. shipbuilding capacity and how will collaboration with Canadian and Finnish shipbuilders improve the efficiency and resiliency of our shipbuilding industrial base?
2. How will ICE Pact impact the procurement plan and construction timeline for the Polar Security Cutter program, as well as other U.S. Coast Guard shipbuilding programs? What are the potential benefits of ICE Pact to furthering existing and future Coast Guard shipbuilding efforts?
3. How will the ICE Pact initiative align with NATO's current icebreaker capability requirements, and will it be necessary to revise these targets in future budget cycles to encourage Allies and partners to purchase icebreakers built in American, Canadian, or Finnish shipyards?

4. What is the Administration's plan to solicit and incorporate feedback from all relevant stakeholders – including but not limited to the U.S. shipbuilding industry, workforce representatives, the Coast Guard-Navy Integrated Program Office, the Coast Guard, and the Department of Homeland Security – throughout negotiations over ICE Pact implementation?
5. What, if any, regulatory and statutory changes does the Administration anticipate will be needed to support ICE Pact's implementation – particularly in its workforce development and information sharing components?

Thank you again for your Administration's close attention to Arctic and polar security. We look forward to reviewing your prompt responses and to working with you on the ICE Pact's implementation in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator