

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

**Remarks Prior to a Boat Tour of Kenai Fjords National Park in Seward, Alaska
September 1, 2015**

We're going to go out and look at some of these spectacular fjords on one of our Coast Guard cutters. But before we go out, I just wanted to mention that one of the things we've been trying to highlight during this trip is the changing nature of the Arctic, partly as a consequence of climate change. There's a whole series of strategic implications—economic and national security—and one of the things that we have to think about is how do we maintain our capabilities when it comes to maritime issues and commerce.

After World War II, we had seven icebreakers: four under the Navy, three under the Coast Guard. Today, in part because we haven't been reinvesting, although we technically have three, operationally, we really only have two, and only one heavy icebreaker. Just to give you a sense of contrast, Russia has about 40, and 11 icebreakers either planned or under construction.

Now, in light of the changes that are going to be taking place and the fact that we're going to be seeing more commercial vessels going through the Arctic, even if we're on top of the climate change issues, some of the change is already happening and is going to be inevitable. It's important that we are prepared so that whether it's for search-and-rescue missions, whether it's for national security reasons, whether it's for commercial reasons, that we have much greater capabilities than we currently have.

So one of the things that I'm announcing today is a proposal to accelerate the construction of at least one additional heavy icebreaker and to work with Congress to make sure that we are producing a sufficient fleet to meet our economic, commercial, maritime, and national security needs.

And this is something that's been championed by Republicans like Senator Sullivan here in Alaska, but also Democrats like Maria Cantwell in Washington. We think that we should be able to generate some bipartisan support, although it's going to be a lot easier to do if we are not continuing to labor under the burdens of sequester that threaten our domestic priorities and investments, but also burden our military and our national security long-term investments.

These icebreakers are examples of something that we need to get on line now. They can't wait. And I'm looking forward to trying to work with Congress to make that happen. All right?

Enjoy the trip, guys. Stay warm out there.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:24 p.m. at Seward Harbor.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Kenai Fjords National Park in Seward, AK :: Boat tour, remarks prior.

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