

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 30, 2020

Admiral Karl L. Schultz
Commandant
United States Coast Guard
2703 Martin Luther King Jr Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20593

Dear Admiral Schultz:

On behalf of our maritime communities on the Great Lakes who depend on Coast Guard icebreaking to keep shipping lanes open during winter months, we urge you to swiftly implement the FY 2020 Consolidated Appropriations Act's creation of an acquisition office for a new Great Lakes icebreaker and begin procuring this vessel as quickly as possible.

As you know, maritime commerce on the Great Lakes is critical to our region's economy. Fifteen to 20% of annual cargo volumes are typically transported during the annual "ice season" from mid-December to mid-April. The inability to deliver those cargoes due to inadequate icebreaking services can cost our region's economy hundreds of millions to one billion dollars in a single winter, as happened during the winters of 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2018-2019. Ultimately, icebreaking performance hinges on the successful delivery of this cargo, and three out of that past seven years, the U.S. Coast Guard has been unable to provide adequate icebreaking services to the Great Lakes region. While these shortcomings may be exacerbated during unusually harsh winters, inadequate U.S. Coast Guard icebreaking capability is the foundation of the problem.

Over the past four decades, the Canadian Coast Guard Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River icebreaking fleet has shrunk from six icebreaking capable vessels to two and the U.S. Coast Guard Great Lakes icebreaking fleet has shrunk from 14 icebreaking capable vessels to nine. While we understand that the U.S. Coast Guard is trying to do the best it can with the assets it has, and by coordinating with the Canadian Coast Guard, our region should not have to endure reduced trade winter after winter. There simply are not enough icebreakers in the region anymore to sustain maritime commerce during winters that experiences historically average to above average ice.

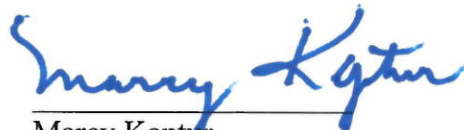
Additionally, two-thirds of the U.S. Coast Guard icebreaking fleet in our region is more than 30 years old. The Coast Guard has recently conducted a Service Life Extension Program on six 140-foot icebreakers in the Great Lakes, yet because their main engines were not replaced, these vessels have become increasingly unreliable during the ice season. Over the past eight years, the Coast Guard Great Lakes icebreaking fleet has averaged 93 lost operational days during the ice season--the equivalent of one icebreaker--due to maintenance problems. Replacement of the 140-foot icebreaking vessels is not expected within the next decade or more. A new MACKINAW-class icebreaker could be procured in a much shorter timeframe.

Admiral, we applaud your commitment to supporting the maritime commerce that underpins our region and nation's economy. We ask that you please stand up the Great Lakes icebreaking program office as soon as practicable, and we stand ready to assist you in any way we can.

Sincerely,



Mike Gallagher
Member of Congress



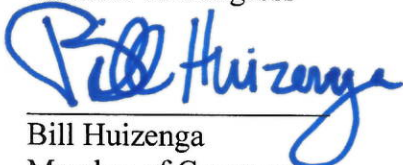
Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



David P. Joyce
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



Bill Huizenga
Member of Congress



Jack Bergman
Member of Congress



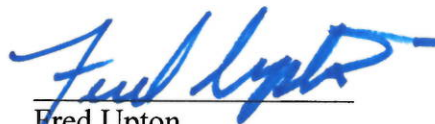
Bill Foster
Member of Congress



Daniel T. Kildee
Member of Congress



Pete Stauber
Member of Congress



Fred Upton
Member of Congress

Bob Gibbs
Member of Congress

Mike Kelly
Member of Congress

Tim Walberg
Member of Congress

Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress

John Moolenaar
Member of Congress

Brenda Lawrence
Member of Congress

Haley M. Stevens
Member of Congress

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

Peter J. Visclosky
Member of Congress