

United States Senate

August 5, 2015

The Honorable John Thune
Chairman
Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science and Transportation
560 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman
House Committee on Transportation
And Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science and Transportation
254 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio
Ranking Member
House Committee on Transportation
And Infrastructure
2163 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Thune and Shuster and Ranking Members Nelson and DeFazio:

As your Committees work to finalize the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015, I respectfully request that you fully support legislation authorizing the design and construction of a new United States Coast Guard (USCG) icebreaker on the Great Lakes. Specifically, I urge you to retain in the final bill Section 101(e) of HR 1987, the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015, which passed the House on May 18, 2015 by voice vote:

(e) ICEBREAKING ON THE GREAT LAKES.—For fiscal years 2016 and 2017, the Commandant of the Coast Guard may use funds made available pursuant to section 2702(2) of title 14, United States Code (as added by subsection (a) of this section) for the selection of a design for and the construction of an icebreaker that is capable of buoy tending to enhance icebreaking capacity on the Great Lakes.

Michigan and other Great Lakes States are abundant in natural resources ranging from iron ore to coal to farmland necessary to feed our ever-growing population. The Great Lakes provide a natural shipping corridor from Michigan's mines in the Upper Peninsula to steel manufacturing facilities, power plants, and distribution centers farther south. However, recent winters on the Great Lakes have brought about near record-breaking levels of ice coverage, seriously impairing the movement of commerce on our waterways. The result is a severe loss in revenue and jobs, and delayed economic activity that depress both the region's and the nation's economy.

During the 2013/2014 winter, U.S. flag cargo movements on the Great Lakes dropped by nearly 7 million tons, causing at least two steelmakers to reduce production, several power plants to nearly exhaust their supply of coal, and a total estimated cost of nearly 4,000 jobs and \$700 million in lost business revenue. This past winter resulted in an estimated decrease in cargo of 3.2 million tons, costing the economy \$355 million in lost revenue and nearly 2,000 jobs.

The USGC operates an aging fleet on the Great Lakes that includes only nine icebreaking-capable cutters, some of which were commissioned back in the 1970s. In 2006, the USCG took a positive step towards combating Great Lakes ice by launching a heavy icebreaker called the USCGC MACKINAW. However, after nine years of severe wear and tear due to ever worsening winters, it is absolutely vital that Congress supplement this fleet by authorizing the construction of a second MACKINAW-sized, multi-mission icebreaking vessel.

It is the duty of the brave men and women who serve in the USCG to keep our nation's waters clear and safe and Congress must do its part to provide them with the resources they need to fulfill this critical mission. By including in the bill Section 101(e) of HR, 1987, the Coast Guard Authorization Act, Congress will recognize the importance to our economy of commerce on the Great Lakes and will be responsive to the critical needs of the USCG.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary Peters", written in a cursive style.

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator