

U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin

U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Subcommittee on Oceans, Fisheries, Climate Change and Manufacturing

Field Hearing:
Importance of Great Lakes Icebreaking to the Regional Economy

March 1, 2024
Green Bay, Wisconsin

Opening Remarks

Good morning. Thank you all for making the effort to be here today. For those of you who traveled from out of state, welcome to Wisconsin. I want to especially thank the Neville Public Museum for hosting and to thank all of the individuals who welcomed us to Green Bay today.

As Chair of the Commerce Subcommittee that oversees the Coast Guard and our Great Lakes, it is an honor to hold this hearing in Green Bay on an issue that has been a longstanding priority for me and so many in this room. I look forward to our discussion on the importance of Great Lakes icebreaking to Wisconsin and the regional economy.

The importance of the Great Lakes Navigation System cannot be overstated. Commerce on the Great Lakes supports more than \$20 billion dollars in regional economic activity, including 147,000 jobs and \$10.5 billion dollars in wages that go directly to hard working individuals right here in our region. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reports that the Great Lakes save the economy \$3.9 billion dollars per year by providing a less costly way to transport goods.

We are in Green Bay to hold this hearing, not by accident or happenstance: just down the street is the Port of Green Bay, which is a vital hub in this navigation system that generates jobs and supports economic activity that is so vital to Wisconsin and to the region.

I am grateful that today we will be able to hear directly from the people who have firsthand experience moving commodities through our Port and keeping this critical part of the regional economy active and healthy.

On our second panel today, we will hear from Dean Haen, the Port Director for the Port of Green Bay; Ken Przybyla, Vice President of Operations for GLC Minerals, a company that has over 150 years of experience moving commodities through the Great Lakes, and Jim Weakley, President of the Lake Carriers Association.

Icebreaking during the winter months is crucial to sustaining the movement of goods that powers our regional economy. I recognize that we are having a warmer than usual winter that is presenting its own challenges for small businesses across the state. Still, three of the worst Great Lakes ice seasons of the past several decades occurred during the past ten years and, during these three years combined, inadequate icebreaking cost our region's economy approximately two billion dollars and ten thousand jobs due to reductions in maritime commerce and resulting impacts on manufacturing industries.

Climate change is contributing to more extreme weather events, larger quantities of precipitation and higher lake levels. During the winter, these changes result in greater risk of flooding because ice collects in rivers and forms ice dams. Our communities rely on Coast Guard icebreakers to break up those ice dams and prevent flooding in our communities.

The Coast Guard is the only federal entity required and equipped to perform icebreaking on U.S. waterways. There are currently nine Great Lakes icebreakers, including just one heavy icebreaker, the Coast Guard

Cutter MACKINAW, which has been in service for 17 years. This vessel is currently the only heavy icebreaking resource assigned to the Great Lakes, conducting 14 percent of the Coast Guard's average annual domestic icebreaking hours.

From reliable supply chains, to saving lives and property from flooding, we need more icebreakers. That's why I have consistently advocated for the acquisition of a new heavy Great Lakes icebreaker. I was proud to work with my colleagues to introduce the bipartisan Great Lakes Winter Commerce Act, which was signed into law as part of the National Defense Authorization Act in December 2022. This bill authorized full funding for a new heavy Great Lakes icebreaker at \$350 million.

As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I am continuing to work to ensure we secure that funding. In the Senate we have bipartisan government funding legislation that includes \$55 million for this new heavy icebreaker, and I have been – and will continue – to press my colleagues to pass this important funding bill. And I will continue to fight for full funding of the icebreaker and an on-time appropriations bill next year.

Admiral Fagan, Admiral Hickey, Master Chief Jones, and Master Chief Buckman, thank you for being here today. I look forward to discussing this region's icebreaking needs with you, as well as items important to our Coast Guard families stationed in the Great Lakes region, such as access to adequate and affordable child care, housing, and healthcare. I am confident we can work together to better serve those who serve our nation.

We will now turn to our witnesses for their opening testimony, starting with Admiral Fagan. We will include your full written testimony in the record, so please keep your remarks to five minutes or less.

Thank you again.