

Alaska Senators oppose Coast Guard cuts

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Alaska Sens. Frank Murkowski and Ted Stevens today urged the Senate conferees on the Coast Guard Budget to reconsider proposed cuts of \$230 million from the Coast Guard program.

Under the Senate version of the Department of Transportation's appropriations bill, the cut in the Coast Guard's operating budget would result in a 30 percent cut in the Alaska ship and air fleets, and a 20 percent cut in personnel. The cut would also result in the decommissioning of six Coast Guard cutters and the closing of five Coast Guard stations.

"The Coast Guard is important to the United States for its military presence, drug interdiction, search and rescue, and border patrol duties," Murkowski and Stevens wrote in a joint letter to Senate conferees. "But Alaska, with its 33,000 miles of shoreline, especially needs the service the Coast Guard provides."

"Alaska's unique geography necessitates a close relationship with the Coast Guard," Senator Murkowski said. "We rely heavily on it to protect our commercial fishing industry — the largest employer in the state — from over exploitation by foreign fleets. The

Coast Guard also helps to ensure the safety of our fishermen in our waters."

"Ever since this money was cut at the subcommittee level, I've worked closely with the subcommittee chairman, Sen. Mark Andrews of North Dakota, to see that the funds are restored," Sen. Stevens explained. "Sen. Andrews has indicated his commitment to try to restore the funds, which are so critical to marine safety in our state."

"With over half our population living in coastal communities, Alaska's use of the ocean and waterways for transportation, fishing, and offshore oil development means it is essential that the Coast Guard be ready and able to provide assistance in emergencies," the senators wrote in the letter to Andrews.

According to the Alaska senators, 86 lives were lost in maritime accidents, but 222 lives were saved by the Coast Guard in 1984. Also, the Coast Guard patrolled 530,000 miles monitoring Alaska's fisheries and issued over 200 citations at a cost of \$50 million in 1984.

"I have every expectation that these operating funds will be restored to the Coast Guard budget," Stevens said. "In addition, I've worked to see that a portion of a \$375 million capital appropriation for the Coast Guard will benefit Alaska. This money is in the Defense bill and will be used to purchase patrol boats, C-130 aircraft and helicopters."

"With a billion dollar fishing industry and a foreign fishery three times the volume of the state fishery, the need for enforcement is clear," Murkowski and Stevens wrote in the letter.