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Speech to Arctic Parliamentarians on Aspects of U.S. Arctic Policy

Fairbanks, August 13, 2008

Good morning. I'd like to thank Senator Murkowski and her staff for arranging this meeting and for inviting the State Department to participate. I am well aware of the contribution made by Arctic Parliamentarians to Arctic policies and programs, both as part of this organization and back home through national legislation.

Under Secretary Paula Dobriansky, who has represented the United States at previous Arctic Council ministerial meetings, had hoped to join you today, but she was required to go to Europe this week and sends her regrets. I am the Director of the Office of Oceans Affairs at the State Department. My office handles issues related to the Arctic and Antarctic, as well as a wide range of maritime matters. We who work in this area have long understood the importance of the Arctic, but only in the last several years has it become the focus of considerable attention by government officials, the media, and the general public. This morning, I would like to provide an overview of some aspects of U.S. Arctic policy.

The Arctic is strategically important to the United States. The state of Alaska is a valued part of our national heritage. Hundreds of thousands of our citizens live there; we have major fisheries and other industries based in Alaska; we rely on the state's energy resources; and we conduct important scientific research in the Arctic, on land and in the marine environment. These interests date back to 1857, when we purchased Alaska from Russia. During the Cold War, national security was the top foreign policy priority in the Arctic, and remains a priority to this day. But, as you can imagine, there are many other aspects of our foreign policy in the region that we have focused on more recently, including environmental protection, energy development, and human health.

Review of Federal Arctic Policy

For the past year and a half, the U.S. Executive Branch has been reviewing its policies related to the Arctic region in a comprehensive manner. It is the first time we have done this sort of internal review since 1994. The Department of State and the National Security Council are leading the process, which involves every federal agency with Arctic responsibilities. We are in the final stages of this review, and we hope to be able to release the final product in the near future, perhaps as soon as a few weeks from now. Because at this point the policy has not been released, I am not in a position to discuss its content or its conclusions. However, I can share with you some of the key issues that we have been discussing.

The Arctic policy issued in 1994 focused on important issues of environmental protection, national security, and scientific research, but much has changed in the Arctic in the last decade. Climate change is having dramatic effects, notably significant melting of Arctic sea ice. As a result, we anticipate increasing human activity in areas such as shipping and energy development. We want to ensure that these activities are conducted in a way that minimizes any negative effects on the Arctic environment.

The ongoing review is focusing on the following topics:

national security and homeland security,

international governance,

extended continental shelf and boundary issues,

international scientific cooperation,

shipping,

economic issues, including energy, and

environmental protection and conservation of natural resources.

As soon as we are able to, we will share this policy directive with all interested parties, including our international partners with interests in the Arctic.

Arctic Council

The policy that was issued in 1994 preceded the establishment of the Arctic Council, the high-level forum that is now the basis of extensive cooperation among the eight Arctic states on issues related to environmental protection and sustainable development. The Arctic Council, the only major diplomatic forum devoted to Arctic issues, is a unique body because of the role played by indigenous groups as Permanent Participants.

The Department of State leads U.S. delegations to Arctic Council meetings. The U.S. Senior Arctic Official is one of my staff members. The United States is committed to continuing its support for the Council. We have found it a valuable forum for collaborating on common interests and challenges with our Arctic neighbors.

Ilulissat Conference

In recent months, there have been some important diplomatic developments related to the Arctic beyond the framework of the Arctic Council. As you know, Denmark hosted a ministerial-level meeting in Greenland in May. Deputy Secretary Negroponte represented the United States. The participants issued the *Ilulissat Declaration* reaffirming their commitment to the extensive international legal framework applicable to the Arctic and pledging cooperation among the five Arctic coastal states. We also are committed to continuing to work with all of our other partners with interests in the Arctic.

ECS

The international legal framework highlighted in the *Ilulissat Declaration* includes, of course, the law of the sea. Pursuant to article 76 of the Law of the Sea Convention, two Arctic coastal States, the Russian Federation and Norway, have already made submissions to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. Canada and Denmark will make their submissions in 2013 and 2014.

The United States is also collecting data on the extent of our continental shelf beyond 200 miles from shore. We are working in the Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific, but the largest area we have is in the Arctic. I have the honor of chairing an interagency task force that is coordinating this work. In fact, tomorrow is the day the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Healy* sails from Barrow to collect bathymetric data at the northern edge of the Chukchi Cap.

In early September, the *Healy* will return to Barrow, and then join the Canadian icebreaker, the *Louis S. St. Laurent*, for four weeks in an area of the Arctic Ocean of interest to both Canada and the United States. The *Healy* will continue seafloor mapping while it breaks ice ahead of the *Louis*, which will be collecting multi-channel seismic data aimed at determining sediment thickness. These cruises will also provide greater scientific insight into relatively unexplored regions of the Arctic Ocean.

Energy

The United States, like other countries, is interested in promoting sustainable development of energy resources in the Arctic. By now you are aware of a major report released by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) last month. It provides important new information about undiscovered oil and gas reserves in the Arctic. The report estimates that 22% of the world's undiscovered oil and gas reserves are found north of the Arctic Circle. The Arctic accounts for about 13% of the undiscovered oil, 30% of the undiscovered natural gas, and 20% of the undiscovered natural gas liquids in the world. USGS worked with a number of international organizations to conduct the geologic analyses. Before we can make decisions about our future use of these resources, and related decisions about protecting endangered species, native communities, and the health of our planet, we need sound scientific research like that contained in the USGS report.

Marine Safety

With sea ice receding, we will see more shipping and ship-borne tourism in the Arctic. As a result, we need to improve international capacity to promote safety of life at sea in the Arctic Ocean. Safety of life at sea requires that we cooperate on search and rescue operations and maintain regular and open communications to respond to accidents and environmental emergencies, which we all hope will be rare. With increasing tourism and human presence in the Arctic Ocean, the United States is committed to working with all interested countries in ensuring safe and responsible activity in the region.

Arctic Science and Projects

Climate change is, of course, a tremendously important issue for the Arctic. We are concerned with the impacts of climate change that are being felt there. The Arctic is a vitally important place for studying how global change affects the entire planet. Change at the poles is occurring at a rapid pace that has immediate impacts on the people who live there, as well as on the flora and fauna in the entire region. Climate change is the overwhelming focus of the scientific community's attention to the Arctic. It frames political discourse as well, especially in light of the recent reports released by the IPCC.

U.S. climate policy is based on sound science for sound decision-making. The United States invests billions of dollars on multi-agency research programs related to climate change, which we hope provides a sound scientific basis for national and international decision-making. Since 2001, the President has requested and Congress has provided substantial funding for climate-related science, technology, observations, international assistance and incentive programs – on the order of \$45 billion. We are also going to make available more than \$40 billion in loan-guarantee authority to support private-sector incentives and innovative clean energy technologies. The 2009 budget requests more than \$4 billion to support technologies that have the potential to avoid, reduce, and sequester greenhouse gases. In other words, we've got a strong agenda when it comes to providing money to bring new more efficient and clean technologies to market.

In the Arctic, Federal scientific efforts are coordinated through the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee (IARPC) with advice from the U.S. Arctic Research Commission. U.S. agencies currently spend more than \$360 million per year on Arctic research.

I'd like to mention several examples: First, the U.S.-sponsored Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, which was launched during the U.S. chairmanship of the Arctic Council from 1998 to 2000. We are proud of the scientific work that went into the Assessment. This effort has elevated public awareness of the impacts of climate change in the Arctic.

In addition, the United States, working with our Arctic partners, is dedicating significant resources to the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA) under the auspices of the Protection of the Marine Environment (PAME) working group of the Arctic Council. AMSA is the largest and most comprehensive effort ever to look at current and future Arctic shipping, including assessments of the social, environmental, and economic impacts of marine activity. PAME will present the AMSA final report at the April 2009 Arctic Council ministerial meeting.

The United States is also playing a leading role in the Arctic Human Health Initiative (AHHI). The AHHI brings together 13 different U.S. Government, Alaska Native, academic, and research organizations with their international counterparts to focus on human health concerns of Arctic residents. The AHHI is an International Polar Year project supported by the Arctic Council. The Initiative focuses on a range of health issues, from infectious and chronic disease surveillance to contaminants in the indigenous traditional food supply, as well as other health concerns, many of which may be influenced by climate change. A key part of the AHHI is the International Circumpolar Surveillance project, led by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This project addresses prevention and control of infectious diseases in the Arctic.

IPY Day and ATCM

Finally, I would like to note that the United States is a strong proponent of International Polar Year. Once IPY is concluded, there will be a period of taking stock of the scientific data that has been produced. We felt that it would also be useful to gather senior officials at the conclusion of IPY to provide diplomatic support for the future of polar science. As a result, the Arctic Council SAO's have already agreed that the Council will hold its first-ever joint session with the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties on April 6, 2009, the first day of the U.S.-hosted Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. We hope that the meeting will be at the ministerial level among the Antarctic Treaty Parties and Arctic States (and will include Permanent Participants). Although the ATCM will primarily be held in Baltimore for two weeks, we plan to hold this joint session in Washington at the Department of State and the National Academies of Science. We hope this event will provoke even more public and media attention to the polar regions and to their critical importance to Planet Earth.

Thank you.

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