

U.S. Rep. Sensenbrenner: Reintroduces legislation to bolster American standing in Arctic Circle, check Russian and Chinese influence

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Washington, D.C.-Today Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner (WI-05) reintroduced legislation to create a U.S. Ambassador at Large for Arctic Affairs.

Rep. Sensenbrenner: “At a time when Russia and China are expanding their ambitions and influence throughout the Arctic Circle, the U.S. must take diplomatic action to strengthen our role and maintain stability in this strategic region of the world. By assigning a permanent Ambassador at Large for Arctic Affairs, America can provide a check to these adversarial powers. I applaud Secretary of State Pompeo for acknowledging the importance of the region and urge my colleagues to pass this legislation as soon as possible.”

Background:

The United States is an Arctic nation and has a geo-economic interest in the Arctic Circle. The region provides growing potential for trade, travel, research, and energy development and exploration. America currently sits on the Arctic Council, where six of the eight member nations have already established an Ambassador or Senior official for Arctic Affairs. Rather than having a centralized office, the U.S. government has more than 20 agencies conducting work in the region.

In recent years, China and Russia have begun taking action that should concern

American and the other Arctic nations. After gaining observer status on the Arctic Council in 2013, China started to expand research into natural resources and ice-breaking technology, sparking concerns over possible military installations, according to the State Department's Annual Report to Congress. Additionally, a recent Department of Defense article highlights Russia's efforts to unilaterally control access to parts of the region—potentially violating international law.

Reintroduction of this bill comes following Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's May 6 speech before the Arctic Council in Rovaniemi, Finland in which he expounded on America's renewed focus on the Arctic region.

This legislation would amend the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956 to establish an Ambassador at Large for Arctic Affairs within the State Department to strengthen the U.S. relationship with the Arctic region and allow the U.S. to better coordinate Arctic policy among government agencies. Congressman Sensenbrenner has been pressing both the Obama and Trump administrations to create this position each Congress beginning in 2014 just before America was to start its two-year term as chair of Arctic Council. He has introduced identical bills in the 113th, 114th, and 115th Congresses.