

U.S. Rep. Gallagher: Questions Coast Guard on Great Lakes ice breaking

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This week, Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-WI) questioned U.S. Coast Guard Vice Admiral Paul Thomas on the Coast Guard's Great Lakes icebreaking plan to ensure commerce continues without interruption during the upcoming winter months. Gallagher, who introduced legislation earlier this year to help strengthen the Coast Guard's icebreaking mission on the Great Lakes, also called for Congress to appropriate funds to add an icebreaker to the Coast Guard's fleet.

Watch the exchange [here](#), or read the transcript of the conversation below.

Rep. Gallagher: "Vice Admiral Thomas, thank you for being here. Recently, the news has been filled with stories about supply chain problems, supply chain vulnerabilities, and supply chain disruptions. But an industrial commodity supply chain concern has received much less attention, and I'm talking about supplying iron ore to U.S. Great Lakes steel manufacturers. As you know, steel is needed to build Navy ships, Army vehicles, US manufactured cars, trucks, farm equipment, appliances and other equipment. Unfortunately, due to a gap between the departure of the Coast Guard Cutter Alder from Duluth and its replacement's arrival, my understanding is that Lake Superior is going to be without a Coast Guard icebreaking capacity that would ensure the safe movement of iron ore cargo vessels this winter. Also, the Coast Guard's current Great Lakes icebreaking performance standards do not measure any ice impacts on commercial navigation in Lake Superior. That leads to two questions. One, what will the Coast Guard do this winter to ensure vital cargoes like iron ore can move through the Great Lakes and two how will the Coast Guard better track their performance of this mission?"

Vice Admiral Thomas Moore: "Thank you for the question. It is not lost on the Coast Guard the economic impact of the Great Lakes waterway system, and I appreciate your continued focus on ensuring that commerce can flow up there. I'm not aware of the icebreaker lay down for this winter. That's something our District Commander would certainly manage. I do know that the Ninth District Commander has agreements with the Canadians, for example, where, you know, they figure out together where the priorities are for icebreaking. The Canadians will assist us and we will assist them. But I'll have to take it for the record to give you some specifics on the Alder and what the Ninth District Commanders plans are to make up for that operational gap."

Rep. Gallagher: "I'll gladly follow up with you on that and I appreciate your commitment to helping me understand the issue better. I mean, doesn't it make sense for the Coast Guard's icebreaking priorities and performance standards to prioritize a region's maritime cargo and their specific impacts on its population if it's not delivered due to the ice, perhaps it's already been factored in. But you know, whether it's transporting fuel in the Northeast or industrial supplies, in the Great Lakes, the goal is to ensure interruptions do not occur. So, is it your understanding that that is factored into the analysis right now?"

Vice Admiral Thomas Moore: "Yes, sir. It absolutely is. We tier all of our waterways. And, you know, we take into account the economic activity that's on those waterways and the highest tiers have the highest priorities."

Rep. Gallagher: "I appreciate that. I think a consistent theme that you've heard on this committee, certainly from the Ranking Member, is that we need more icebreakers and we need more icebreaking capability. And I appreciate the Chairman's comment that we'll have \$1 billion for something, but we need money for icebreakers as well. It seems like we got money for everything except for the things we actually need. So, it's my hope that we will continue to work in a bipartisan passion to fund urgent priorities such as icebreakers. And I've been quite frankly disappointed on our lack of urgency with which we've tackled that issue. So less of a question to you and more of a statement to myself and my colleagues on the committee. With that, I yield back."