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September 25, 2012

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

On September 5-7, 2012, I attended the 10th Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians, the Legislative Branch equivalent of the Arctic Council, in Akureyri, Iceland. A copy of the Conference Statement adopted by the participants is enclosed for your review. With your leadership on Arctic issues I wanted to report back the highlights of the Conference as well as convey the significant expressions of gratitude from the parliamentarians for your role in elevating the United States' participation in the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Nuuk, Greenland, as well as the United States' overall interest in the Arctic.

Participants in the Conference focused on the need for a stronger Arctic Council (Council) in order to make the Arctic more relevant to the rest of the world and to better communicate the actions of the Council. Evidence of the world's growing interest in the Arctic could be found by the presence of a delegation from Singapore who expressed concern about the potential impact of rising sea levels on their nation and their resulting desire to become a Permanent Observer at the Council. This is in addition to requests by the Governments of Japan, China, and South Korea to also be Permanent Observers. With this increased interest from a diverse group of outside parties it is important for the Council to maintain its leadership on Arctic issues through strong, collaborative actions, such as the Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement, and to agree on observer status of interested parties to secure the Council as the primary forum for Arctic cooperation.

In addition, participants expressed the need for greater engagement and participation by the indigenous peoples of the Arctic in the Council's work, taking into account and consideration their traditional knowledge of the region as well as the impact that commercial activity in the Arctic could have on their way of life. As economic development opportunities in the Arctic become increasingly viable, it is important for the Council to work in collaboration with the indigenous populations to include their views on agreements between the Arctic nations.

I cannot overemphasize the words of appreciation from the participants regarding the United States Government's new level of engagement on Arctic issues in large part because of your personal interest in the region. As Iceland's Foreign Minister Össur Skarphéðinsson remarked,

the United States may have been late to the party but when it arrived, it arrived in style. I am concerned, however, that the United States is not prepared for the level of sustained commitment that is needed when it is our turn to Chair the Council. In discussions with a representative of the Swedish Chairmanship of the Council, it is my understanding that Sweden has devoted more personnel and resources to the Council's work than at any time in the past. Canada is expected to allocate an even greater amount of personnel and resources than Sweden, leaving considerable expectations for the United States' Chairmanship starting in 2015.

I would like to work with you to ensure that the United States maintains its commitment to the Arctic and demonstrates leadership in this region, including through the designation of a senior political official to serve as the United States' Ambassador to the Arctic. I welcome your thoughts on this matter and other ways to strengthen the United States' efforts in the Arctic.

As always, I thank you for your leadership on the Arctic and remain committed to working with you on these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa Murkowski", with a large, stylized initial "L".

Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

Enclosure: Conference Statement