

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

February 10, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to you in regards to Arctic diplomacy. In particular, we understand your lead for Arctic Affairs, the Coordinator of the Arctic Region, is vacating his position this summer when he moves on to another assignment within the State Department. We commend the work of the outgoing Arctic Coordinator and aim to ensure the Department of State builds on this work to serve the national interest in the Arctic. As we approach this transition period, we would like to bring your attention to three issues: the need to lead with diplomacy, your Department's organizational approach to the region, and the need for a comprehensive Arctic strategy.

It is imperative the Arctic receives the appropriate attention to promote American interests in a world where we compete for ideas, resources, and relationships. As you consider your options to either fill the Arctic Coordinator vacancy or take another direction altogether, we write to convey our thoughts about the importance of this issue and the dedication required by your Department to credibly impart our sincerity on Arctic issues to our friends and competitors.

With this in mind, we request that you consider elevating the position of Arctic Coordinator to the Ambassador level or higher. The U.S. is the only Arctic nation without a dedicated Ambassador to the region. While we know other nations will always hear our perspective because of our international standing, it is important to demonstrate the sincerity our government holds in its engagement by ensuring the position is given a title commensurate with its responsibilities.

The State Department's recent history with Arctic diplomacy is disjointed. The "Arctic Coordinator" position was established in August 2020. Previous to that, from 2015-2017, coinciding with the U.S. Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, the State Department established a Special Representative for Arctic Affairs. Before 2015, we lacked any senior level Arctic leadership within the State Department. While both the Arctic Coordinator and the Special Representative advanced our nation's interests in the Arctic, neither position was given the authority within the Department to align resources to policy nor did they hold the rank equivalency of their counterparts from other Arctic nations. Additionally, for nearly three years between the two positions, our country lacked a lead Arctic diplomat. We urge you to not let this lapse happen again.

We also understand responsibility within the State Department for Arctic issues is spread between several bureaus. An August 2021 State Department Office of Inspector General report on the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs revealed that roles and responsibilities for Arctic affairs are not clearly defined, communication between the Arctic Coordinator's Office and other bureaus is lacking, and the Department does not possess a clearly articulated Arctic strategy. In light of this report we find it paramount to ensure the Arctic Coordinator position (or its future equivalent) receives appropriate support and guidance from Department leadership and be empowered to delineate these responsibilities, establish effective internal communication and responsibilities, and represent U.S. interests outwardly. These factors must be considered for the future of this position and its role in your Department.

The Department of Defense (DOD) recently established a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Arctic Affairs and Global Resilience. DOD released an Arctic Strategy in 2019 and each military service branch has subsequently released their own Arctic strategies. We understand no such strategic document exists for the Department of State. As the lead agency in international affairs, we ask that you ensure the Arctic receives the attention required of our nation's leading agency.

Given these considerations we ask that you provide a back brief at the staff level no later than April 1, 2022 on how the Department will address our concerns on 1) the future of the Arctic Coordinator position, 2) the status of a comprehensive and holistic Arctic strategy for the Department, and 3) how you are aligning or redistributing assets, resources, and personnel within the Department to address the issues identified in the aforementioned Inspector General's report.

We look forward to hearing from you about these critical issues and offer our support to advance Arctic diplomacy.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Lindsey O. Graham
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Susan Collins
United States Senator



Bill Hagerty
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator