

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 6, 2019

Admiral Karl Schultz
Commandant, United States Coast Guard
2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20593

Dear Admiral Schultz,

We write to express our considerable concerns regarding recent reports that the Coast Guard is experiencing VHF-FM radio outages across the Gulf of Alaska. We urge you to quickly find a solution to this issue that will allow mariners transiting these waterways to have VHF coverage monitoring for their safety at sea.

From childhood, Alaskans are taught the importance of safety at sea and calling for help in the event of an emergency. As a result, the VHF reporting system is widely known, trusted, and relied on across the Gulf of Alaska and its coastal communities. It is worrisome to hear that the existing VHF infrastructure is lacking in needed maintenance and support, and therefore cannot fulfill its role as an emergency communication system.

In addition to the scale and duration of these VHF outages, we are also concerned that local mariners operating in the outage area are not familiar with alternative methods for making distress calls in an emergency. Without clear recommendations from the Coast Guard, it is almost inevitable that there will be confusion around using alternative methods to call for help in the future. A recent USCG news release notifying the public of this issue suggested that mariners remain vigilant and have another means of emergency contact, such as a satellite phone or cellphone. We urge the Coast Guard to increase its efforts to notify the public of these outages, and provide clear, comprehensive instructions for contacting Coast Guard responders in the event of an emergency or distress call.

We are fully supportive of long-term infrastructure investments that support the Coast Guard's mission. Considering the critical need for sufficient VHF coverage and the estimated timeframe for completion of the necessary repairs, however, the Coast Guard's current proposed timeline for resolving these outages is not acceptable to us. We recognize that the maintenance of remote sites is challenging and that additional resources may be necessary, however, maintaining full Search and Rescue (SAR) coverage is critical for our constituents who regularly travel and work in these areas.

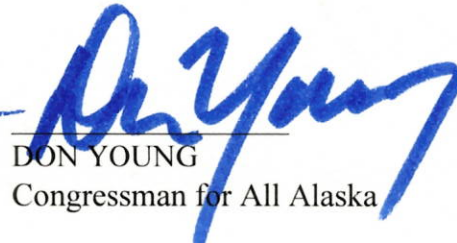
We ask you to provide us with the Coast Guard's plan for addressing these concerns, including an accelerated timeline for the long-term repairs. Thank you for your attention to this matter and for all the work you do in Alaska to safeguard our constituents. We stand ready to be helpful in developing and implementing a solution to this issue as soon as possible, and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



LISA MURKOWSKI
United States Senator

DAN SULLIVAN
United States Senator



DON YOUNG
Congressman for All Alaska