Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 21, 2010

The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Napolitano,

We strongly support your Department's ongoing efforts to protect and secure our homeland from domestic and international threats originating from a maritime environment. We are mindful of the nation's call to reduce spending in a time of increasing financial deficits, but within the budgetary framework, priority must be placed on investments to ensure the safety and security of the American people and to guarantee our nation's armed services are adequately prepared to address the current and future mission requirements.

We are greatly concerned with the current and projected state of the United States Coast Guard resources. While the Coast Guard has long demonstrated the ability to "do more with less," recent events have reinforced the need to take a focused look at the state of the Coast Guard helicopter fleet. We respectfully request the DHS promptly submit to Congress a funding request and supporting documentation necessary to restore the Coast Guard's HH-60 fleet to their fully resourced totals.

As you are aware, a Coast Guard HH-60 helicopter crashed on July 7, 2010, while travelling from Oregon to Alaska. The crash resulted in the loss of the aircraft, the tragic deaths of three service members and significant injuries to the surviving crewmember. While this accident was tragic and the families of those lost have begun the long road of grief and recovery, the missions of the Coast Guard continue.

Alaska has more coastline than any other state in the nation. Air Stations Kodiak and Sitka aircrews are responsible for over 5 million square miles of the Alaskan coastline, and they cover this vast region with only seven HH-60 helicopters. The loss of a helicopter from Air Station Sitka reduces the ability of the Coast Guard to respond to maritime emergencies and places Alaska's commercial and recreational boating public at increased risk. While the Coast Guard helicopter fleet in Alaska will be made whole again as the Coast Guard intends to move a helicopter from

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the lower 48 to Alaska, this shifting of resources will create a resource gap in other regions of the country. This is a national problem that must be addressed.

Congress is looking forward to a long-term plan from the administration to address the known resource gap that resulted from this month's crash, including a possible request for additional funding to procure a replacement helicopter. Given where we are in the budget process, we urge your Department to act as quickly as possible to provide Congress with these necessary items.

We ask you promptly submit to Congress a funding request to replace this HH-60 helicopter and pledge our support to help you with this vital request.

Sincerely,

Senator Lisa Murkowski Senator Mark Begich Congressman Don Young