



Arctic Frontiers Emerging Leaders 2020 Program

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Trip Overview: From 22 to 28 January 2020, I participated in the Arctic Frontiers Emerging Leaders 2020 Program, representing the United States Coast Guard and the Coast Guard Academy's Center for Arctic Study and Policy (CASP). Over the course of the weeklong program, I traveled throughout the Norwegian Arctic from Bodø to the Lofoten Islands and on to Tromsø, where the annual Arctic Frontiers Conference was held from 26 to 30 January.

Overall Experience: The 2020 Emerging Leaders group included 33 individuals representing twelve different nations (both Arctic and non-Arctic). I was one of only two 2020 Emerging Leaders from the United States, and the sole military participant. (The second American participant is currently a graduate student in Paris, France.)



Emerging Leaders 2020 participants and mentors aboard MS Spitsbergen, sailing from Harstad to Tromsø, Norway for the Arctic Frontiers Conference.

Each year, both the Arctic Frontiers Conference and the Emerging Leaders program have a theme. The 2020 Arctic Frontiers Conference theme was, "The Power of Knowledge." As Emerging Leaders, we focused our efforts on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how they pertain to the Arctic.

The first three days of the Emerging Leaders program each had a theme in terms of our briefings and discussions:

Day 1 – Arctic Search and Rescue, Safety, and Transportation

Day 2 – Arctic Marine Resources, Fisheries, and Aquaculture

Day 3 – Arctic Energy (including Oil and Gas, and Renewables)

On our first evening, each Emerging Leader wrote down a primary Arctic concern of the group he/she represents (i.e., indigenous peoples, oil and gas industry, etc.) We were asked to relate our Arctic concern to one of five SDGs, and then divided into small groups by our program "mentors" to develop a comprehensive understanding of the SDG most closely related to our particular Arctic concern. My group was tasked with exploring SDG 14 – Life Below Water.

After presenting the findings of our small groups to the overall Emerging Leaders forum several days later, we worked to develop a presentation for VIP attendees at the Arctic Frontiers Conference describing our collective vision for the Arctic. In our short (roughly ten-minute) presentation, we performed a skit of an "Arctic Anonymous" meeting, with role players representing Arctic nations describing their challenges and suggesting possible solutions to one another. We concluded the presentation with advocating for the establishment of an Arctic Youth Council (an idea proposed by one of the Canadian Emerging Leaders).

Benefits of Participation to an Officer/Polar Operator: Although I served in the Arctic aboard a Coast Guard icebreaker, completed graduate work on sea ice in the Bering Strait, and taught a Polar Oceanography elective course as an instructor at the Coast Guard Academy, the

Emerging Leaders program was unique in helping me to better understand the Arctic from the perspective of other Arctic nations. To most Americans, the Arctic is a remote place in the far north of our country where few people actually live. For other nations (Canada, Norway, etc.), a significant portion of the population has lived and worked in the Arctic for generations. In my interactions with other Emerging Leaders, my own understanding of the need for active U.S. involvement in the Arctic was somewhat tempered by a new-found knowledge and respect for the work that other Arctic nations have and continue to put in to ensuring long-term responsible management of the region. The current situation in the Arctic does not call for a “knight in shining armor” to save the day; instead, it necessitates teamwork, a commitment to common objectives, and Arctic nations working together in enduring partnerships.



VADM Buschman, Atlantic Area Commander, participates in a panel discussion moderated by Stephen Sackur of BBC's HARDtalk at the Arctic Frontiers Conference.

While at the Arctic Frontiers Conference, I was able to meet briefly one-on-one with VADM Buschman (Atlantic Area Commander) and his staff, as well as with RADM Braithwaite, USN (ret), the U.S. Ambassador to Norway. Having the opportunity to interact with these senior leaders at the mid-grade officer level was a unique experience. With Ambassador Braithwaite in particular, I felt my presence at the Conference and as an Emerging Leader was a clear indication of the Coast Guard's

interest in being considered a partner of choice in the Arctic. While I am not yet certain where my next career assignment will take me, I hope to support polar operations again in the future (either in an operational or staff officer role), and believe that my experience as an Emerging Leader will serve me (and by extension, the Coast Guard) well in the future.

Recommendations for Future Selectees: In planning my logistics for the trip, I chose to arrive a day before the Emerging Leaders program started, which I strongly recommend for future participants. Two Emerging Leaders traveling from Quebec arrived almost a day late after their connecting flight from Newark was delayed; as a result, they nearly missed our transit to the Lofoten Islands aboard a coastal cruise vessel (a leg of the trip which would have been difficult to reschedule).

I met with the Coast Guard Headquarters Counterintelligence Staff three times prior to the trip and once upon my return for a debrief. I found their information useful, particularly as this was my first trip overseas on official orders.

Overall, I found the Arctic Frontiers Emerging Leaders 2020 Program to be a worthwhile experience, and I believe there is considerable benefit to sending U.S. Coast Guard representation in the future, if funding is available.



The 2020 Emerging Leaders dine with Vikings in a traditional long-house at the Lofotr Viking Museum.