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June 2001

The Honorable Joe Skeen, Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Skeen:

We are writing to urge you to delete from the FY 2002 Appropriations bill a request by the Department of Interior for $5 million expressly intended to facilitate oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

As you know, the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (the "Section 1002 Area") is currently protected against additional oil and gas exploration or development. We support this prohibition as a critical bulwark against the destruction of the biological heart of the Refuge, and it would appear from numerous public opinion polls, the public supports this prohibition as well. Nevertheless, efforts are under way to erode, undermine and eliminate this prohibition.

Attempts to compromise the wilderness values of the Refuge began with the budget process, where the President proposed that Congress assume revenues from the auction of leases in the Refuge. The Budget Committee, however, deleted that assumption, after a bipartisan coalition urged that the environmental values at stake in this extraordinary wilderness area outweigh the value of the minerals at stake. Therefore, neither the House nor the Senate included any initiative to undermine the protected status of the coastal plain in the budget process.

A second attempt is under way with the release of the President's National Energy Plan, which includes the recommendation that Congress authorize drilling and gas exploration on the coastal plain of the Refuge. As you know, this proposal remains one of the most controversial and least supported items in the entire Energy Plan, and, again, the public opposition to this proposal remains high.

Therefore, other proposals have emerged to try to bend or break the protective barrier that has kept the Refuge free of industrialization, one of which is under consideration by the Appropriations Committee.

In particular, the President has proposed that the 2002 appropriations request for the Bureau of Land Management energy and minerals program be increased by $5 million "to initiate planning and associated environmental studies in the 1002 area to meet the goal of holding the first lease sale in 2004 and support expanded exploration and development of the NPR-A."

We do not believe that there is any justification for appropriating funds in support of a lease sale in the Arctic Refuge at this time. Such sales are illegal today. To spend money in support of something that is unlawful to undertake in the first place seems particularly imprudent and, in any event, would trigger a major debate over a highly charged issue that could severely complicate the passage of the overall bill.

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Therefore, we urge the Committee to reject this request or, at a minimum, to confine the studies to the National Petroleum Reserve (NPR-A), an area specifically set aside for energy extraction that does not involve the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Sincerely,

Edward Markey	George Miller
David Bonior	John Conyers
Sander Levin	Michael Capuano
Jay Inslee	Peter Deutsch
William Luther	Tom Allen
Bernard Sanders	Joseph Hoeffel
Tony Hall	Don Payne
Lynn Woolsey	Dale Kildee
Mark Udall	Adam Schiff
Barney Frank	Bob Filner
Diana DeGette	Alcee Hastings
Ellen Tauscher	Rick Boucher
Michael McNulty	Robert Matsui
Susan Davis	Rod Blagojevich
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Janice Schakowsky	Robert Andrews
John Tierney	Earl Blumenauer
Eleanor Holmes Norton	Howard Berman
Jerrold Nadler	Tammy Baldwin
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Lynn Rivers	Jerry Costello

Jane Harman

Lois Capps

Joseph Crowley

Brian Baird

John Baldacci

Robert Wexler

Lane Evans

Dennis Moore

Rush Holt

Eliot Engel

James McGovern

John Spratt

Jim Davis

Pete Stark

Henry Waxman

Lucille Roybal-Allard