

## **AUTHORIZING OIL AND GAS DRILLING IN THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

Passed: 51 - 48

### **SUMMARY:**

The Senate voted to pass the tax bill, which authorizes an oil and gas drilling program in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge after more than three decades of fighting to protect this wildlife haven from Big Oil's advances. (*December 20, 2017, Roll Call Vote No. 323*)

### **BACKGROUND:**

The assault on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge by the fossil fuel industry and its allies in Congress has been going on for more than three decades. Using a parliamentary trick to treat Arctic Refuge drilling as budget legislation (which it is not), Alaska's congressional delegation was able to attach this controversial legislation to the tax reform bill so that it could inappropriately hitch a ride through the budget reconciliation process and bypass a Senate filibuster. Those who voted to pass the tax reform bill voted to sell out our wildlife to Big Oil and sacrifice the integrity of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge comprises approximately 19.3 million acres of public lands and waters in northeastern Alaska. Approximately 40 percent of the refuge was designated wilderness under the Eisenhower administration. The Coastal Plain, where drilling would occur, is the biological heart of the refuge, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommended in 2015 that the Coastal Plain be forever protected by a wilderness designation. Oil development will irreparably damage this vital landscape. The wilderness and habitat values will be destroyed by an industrial complex, replete with oil spills, leaks and pollution. Pipelines, drill rigs, buildings and other infrastructure accompanied by the noise of industrial development would threaten iconic wildlife and imperil sensitive species that call the refuge home.

The Arctic Refuge contains vital nesting habitat for hundreds of species of migratory birds from all 50 states and six continents; the most important onshore denning habitat for threatened polar bears in the United States; spawning streams for Dolly Varden and other valued fish species; and room to roam for caribou, wolves, muskoxen, Dall sheep, Arctic foxes and many other wildlife species. Most of the Arctic Refuge's Coastal Plain is designated critical habitat for federally threatened polar bears. Mother polar bears with cubs are increasingly dependent on this area as annual sea ice melts more quickly due to a warming climate. The Coastal Plain is also the principal calving ground for the nearly 200,000-strong Porcupine caribou herd, which migrates hundreds of miles to birth and raise their young in the refuge each year. The indigenous Gwich'in people depend on the caribou herd for their survival and way of life, making this both an environmental and human rights issue.

The tax bill passed by Congress also has negative implications for environmental programs. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office projects that the final conferenced tax bill will raise the federal deficit by \$1.45 trillion over the next ten years. This will likely mean big cuts are in store for environmental programs and agencies that protect our landscapes, wildlife, and natural resources in order to help pay for this extremely costly legislation.

In addition, the House version of the tax legislation scaled back key tax credits for renewable energy. Luckily, the final conference bill changes course and maintains those credits. However, these credits

are still set to sunset. The tax bill does nothing to extend these credits, even though it keeps permanent \$14 billion in annual federal tax subsidies for fossil fuel companies.

**OUTCOME:**

On December 20, 2017, the Senate passed H.R. 1 by a vote of 51 to 48. “No” was the pro-conservation vote.