

ADVANCING DRILLING IN THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE AND PASSING AN ANTI-ENVIRONMENTAL BUDGET

Passed: 51-49

SUMMARY:

The Senate passed its budget resolution, which paved the way for oil and gas drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The budget resolution also proposes drastic cuts to discretionary spending totaling \$800 billion, which could hurt environmental programs. (*October 19, 2017, Roll Call No. 245*)

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 sneak this environmentally destructive provision through the budget process by attaching it to budget reconciliation legislation, which is subject to special expedited congressional procedure. By sticking Arctic Refuge drilling into the budget as an unrelated, extraneous rider, Big Oil's allies in Congress were able to bypass a filibuster in the Senate, to which virtually all significant legislation is subject.

The budget resolution that the Senate passed in October instructed the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to draft legislation to raise \$1 billion in revenue through the budget reconciliation process. This teed up Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Chairman of Senate Energy and Natural Resources, to insert Arctic Refuge drilling legislation into the budget process. Arctic Refuge drilling could be included in this process because lease sales for oil drilling could theoretically raise a paltry amount of revenue, which affects the federal budget. Senator Murkowski would not have been able to insert this drilling legislation into the budget reconciliation process without the October vote to pass the budget resolution.

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 budget resolution passed by this Congress's anti-wildlife majority also set a target of \$800 billion in cuts to discretionary spending over the next decade. With a budget cut this drastic, the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and other environmental and conservation agencies would all be forced to undergo severe cuts to their already strained budgets. Our wildlife, environmental, climate, and public health would all be negatively affected if these proposed cuts are enacted through the appropriations process.

OUTCOME:

On October 19, 2017, the Senate passed H. Con. Res. 71 by a vote of 51 to 49. "No" was the pro-conservation vote. This vote set up the subsequent votes on the tax reform legislation, which included Arctic Refuge thanks to the passage of this budget resolution.