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[EXTERNAL] Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program EIS

1 message

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To: blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov

I am writing this message in response to information regarding opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil and gas drilling. This information came to me very recently and I was disturbed to find out that the process that is supposed to require time for public input appears to have been short-circuited, apparently in an attempt to minimize public input. I am not going to focus on climate change or the effects on the animals living in this region, the need to shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, and the short-sighted thinking involved with the decision to open this region to oil and gas drilling since I know these arguments will fall on deaf ears.

As a person who believes in the need to have policy decisions based on sound public policy supported by scientific evidence, I am deeply disturbed by what appears to be an attempt to force a decision that the administration wants without allowing for time to conduct necessary research to determine the effects the decision to open this area to oil and gas drilling will have on the people and the land. There is not a pressing need for the oil and gas because there is not only a current glut of oil and gas on the market, projections do not indicate that there is going to be a shortage for a very long period of time, by which time the transition to renewable energy sources should make needing to obtain oil and gas from this region unnecessary.

As we have repeatedly seen, when there is oil and gas drilling, there will eventually be a problem with a spill. This is not a question of "if," it is a question of "when." Given the difficulty in trying to stop and/or clean up a spill, and the catastrophic effects of oil spills, one would think that industry leaders would be reluctant to attempt drilling in such a challenging environment. One would have to be naive to think that drilling can be safely done in this region. Oil companies have repeatedly demonstrated that they cannot prevent spills and that when spills happen, they cannot clean up the mess they created. This will happen if drilling is allowed in this region and given the difficulty of cleaning up spills in much friendlier environments, how will the industry guarantee that 1) there will not be a spill and 2) when the spill happens, which it will, the spill will be cleaned up and the area returned to the condition it was in prior to the spill. Of course, oil companies will not make such a promise because they know they cannot keep such a promise. Yet I suspect that this issue has not even been raised as this approval process is being rushed through.

The people of Alaska, including native populations, will not significantly benefit from opening this region to drilling. The large majority of people who work in the oil and gas industry are not residents of the area where the drilling takes place - the people, and the profits, go to outsiders, with a small token benefit given to communities that stand to lose much more than they will ever gain.

Regarding national security, please explain to me how this policy will benefit Americans, especially if the highest bidder for the rights to drill in this region are sold to a state-sponsored oil company in Russia or another country that is hostile to the U.S.

Even if one does not believe that climate change is real and is largely caused by humans burning fossil fuels, there are multiple other reasons to slow down this process to allow for careful consideration that includes input from concerned citizens. Citizens are supposed to be allowed a voice in this process. I am asking that this decision process be slowed down, that the public be informed and allowed to provide input, and that the needed scientific studies be conducted so that a truly informed decision can be made.

Yours truly,

Mary West-Smith, Ph.D.