

# Why ANWR Matters

## How Alaska can help meet America's energy needs

By U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski

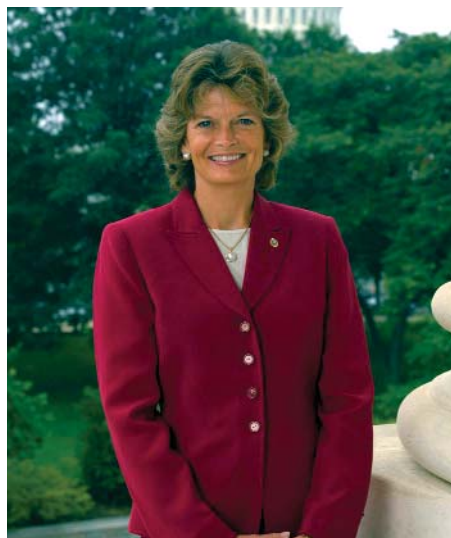
The United States currently is facing record prices for oil and near record prices for natural gas. Prices are so high they are jeopardizing our economy's health and the savings of working men and women. Even with passage this summer of a national energy policy, where we took major steps to foster renewable energy, increase energy efficiency, promote conservation and accelerate new technology from hydrogen cars to advanced nuclear power, we still haven't completed a balanced energy plan.

That task will require us to also increase domestic energy production, which is why Congress this fall will consider whether to permit limited energy development from a tiny portion of the Arctic coastal plain in Alaska.

America developed the first commercial oil well and pioneered natural gas production nearly 146 years ago. Yet today, our policies encourage greater dependence on foreign sources of energy to the detriment of the United States' economy, national security, and yes, even the world's environment. The fact of the matter is that we can increase our domestic production of energy without destroying the beauty of our land, harming our wildlife, or affecting our air and water.

America has the highest environmental standards in the world. Each barrel of oil we produce relieves the pressure for new development under weaker environmental regulations elsewhere, such as the tropical rainforests of Colombia, the sand dunes of the Middle East, or the forests of the Russian Far East. Each barrel produced in America means fewer foreign, single-hulled tankers crossing the oceans, entering crowded harbors and threatening devastating oil spills—in addition to saving the \$166 billion we spent on foreign oil last year.

We clearly need to produce more oil domestically. Our nation is currently 58 percent dependent upon foreign oil for our daily needs. As our production declines, we will grow nearly 70 percent dependent on foreign sources. Opening just 2,000 acres of the 19-million acre Arctic National



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Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) will likely halt that trend.

According to the Energy Information Administration, there's a 50-50 chance the Arctic coastal plain holds about 10.3 billion barrels of economically recoverable oil—enough to produce more than 1 million barrels a day for 30 years or longer. Such a find would be the largest oil field discovered in the world in the past three decades and would equal nearly one-fifth of America's likely domestic production by 2010. Equally important, at current prices, it represents \$24 billion a year that we won't have to spend overseas.

Producing more energy at home will strengthen our economy by producing jobs and tax revenues—potentially 735,000 jobs and \$30 billion to the federal treasury within two decades. It would foster our national security in the mid-term by lessening the potential for America to be subject to blackmail due to foreign boycotts. And allowing more oil development in Alaska would honor the promises Congress thrice made to my state, first at Statehood, later in 1960 when President Eisenhower created the Arctic Wildlife Range, and most recently in 1980 when 131 million acres of Alaska were protected as parks and refuges—the equivalent of all East Coast states com-

bined. Each decision specifically permitted oil development to take place on the coastal plain, unless such development would harm Alaska's environment.

And the truth is that it won't. According to a recent environmental impact statement, less than 1 percent of the vegetation of the Arctic coastal plain likely will be impacted by future oil development.

Directional drilling underground allows oil wells to be placed up to four and hopefully six to eight miles apart, preventing disturbance to the animals that breed and graze in between. Winter exploration on ice roads guarantee that wildlife won't even notice exploration when they return the next summer. And new procedures on seismic work prevent noise when bowhead whales are passing.

Alaska's experience at the nearby Prudhoe Bay oil field, where the caribou herd has grown ten-fold since 1974, shows that caribou can not only tolerate, but flourish in oil fields. That is especially the case since restrictions will prevent any disturbance during the two months when the caribou might be present. We also know how to protect the few polar bears that wander into the area each winter and how to protect the birds that fly over in the summer.

While opposing Arctic development has almost become a religion for some, the truth is that new technology will allow development without harm to wildlife or the land. And exploration needs to happen—and soon. Otherwise America will be held “over a barrel,” paying ever higher prices for the fuel we'll still need to run our vehicles, fly our planes, heat our homes and produce vital petrochemicals—the stuff of everything from heart valves to computers and aspirin to paint.

We have no more time to lose. ☺

— Sen. Lisa Murkowski is an Alaska Republican and a member of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Courtesy of Sen. Murkowski's office