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THE HOUSE HAS SPOKEN: NO DOLLARS FOR DRILLING

“If only they had seen the light sooner, we might have a national energy policy by now”

(WASHINGTON, DC) – Drilling advocates’ attempts to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling were denied yesterday with the passage of the Department of Interior appropriations bill (377-46). The bill, which included language approved by the full Appropriations Committee, specified that no funds “related to potential energy development within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge” should be released from the Department of the Interior.

Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-CT), a leading opponent of plans to drill in the Arctic, expressed his hope that the House’s vote will prompt House energy bill conferees to drop their insistence on a misguided drilling plan. “With this strong signal, the House may have cut the length of our energy conference in half,” Lieberman said. “If only they had seen the light sooner, we might have a national energy policy by now. Now that they finally agree with us on prohibiting drilling in the Arctic Refuge, we can focus on constructive solutions to increase our energy production today and invest in emerging energy technologies tomorrow.”

Rep. Nancy Johnson (R-CT), a lead sponsor of legislation to permanently protect the Arctic Refuge (H.R. 770, the Morris K. Udall Arctic Wilderness Act of 2001), said she applauded yesterday’s passage of the Interior Appropriations bill without any assumption of revenue from drilling in the Refuge. “The decision of the committee clearly shows the strong bipartisan opposition to drilling in one of America’s last wild places,” said Johnson. “We must do all we can to protect this national treasure.”

“The Administration’s drive to turn a pristine wildlife refuge into a filling station is relentless,” said Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA), who sponsors H.R. 770 with Rep. Johnson. “This vote shows that supporters of the Arctic Refuge intend to be just as relentless, only more so.”

Conservationists praised the passage of the bill. “I am happy to see that the House and Senate are finally in agreement – that the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge should be off limits to drilling,” said Cindy Shogan, Executive Director of the Alaska Wilderness League.

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