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CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY \* DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE \*  
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**Congress Tells Obama to Delay Arctic Drilling Due to Begin in 41 Days**  
*In addition, Alaska Native leaders share firsthand perspective with decisionmakers*

WASHINGTON – More than 70 members of Congress sent a letter to President Barack Obama today urging him to delay Shell Oil’s plans for exploratory drilling in the Arctic Ocean that is due to begin in 41 days. The letter, spearheaded by Reps. Jay Inslee (D-WA), Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) and Lois Capps (D-CA), asks that the president halt the drilling plans until the causes of the Deepwater Horizon disaster are known and “the administration has subsequently put into place improved and rigorous prevention technology requirements.”

Although President Obama has made it clear that there should be timeout on all new drilling until he receives a May 28 Department of Interior report on the Gulf of Mexico spill, he hasn’t said what will happen with the Arctic drilling – which is the next exploratory drilling planned in new areas of U.S. offshore waters.

At the same time, Alaska Native leaders from the Arctic Slope are in Washington to continue their efforts to stop the drilling planned for the Arctic Ocean, also known as their “garden.” The leaders, who were in the Gulf earlier this week, are sharing their firsthand observations of the Gulf destruction with lawmakers – while comparing the situation to the lack of response capacity and harsh conditions of their Arctic home.

Shell plans to drill five exploratory wells in the Chukchi Sea and in the Beaufort Sea off of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, despite risks posed by the Arctic’s remoteness, frigid temperatures, sea ice, gale-force winds, intense storms, and heavy fog.

As Coast Guard Commandant Thad W. Allen has testified before Congress, the Coast Guard has “limited response resources and capabilities” in the event of a major oil spill in the Arctic Ocean. In addition, DOI’s Minerals Management Service has stated that they do not have the ability to clean a spill up in sea ice.

What’s more, there is a lack of basic scientific information about the Arctic Ocean – a dearth acknowledged by President Obama in March when he cancelled four future lease sales in the Arctic and ordered government scientists to conduct a gap analysis of science and spill response for the Arctic.

A spill of the magnitude of the one still unfolding in the Gulf of Mexico could leave oil in the waters off Alaska for decades, killing endangered whales, seals, fish, and birds, and destroying feeding grounds - while devastating Alaska Native communities who have lived off the bounty of the Arctic Ocean for thousands of years.

#### QUOTES:

“In light of the catastrophic spill in the Gulf of Mexico, it is only prudent to delay any new exploratory drilling in the Arctic until fundamental questions are answered,” said Rep. Jay Inslee (WA-01). “This isn’t a hypothetical threat. Not only are there questions about the equipment companies are using to prevent spills, but even what a comparably small spill would do to the delicate ecosystem of the Arctic which thousands rely on for their livelihoods.”

“The Obama administration was right to halt new offshore drilling permits until it completes a safety and environmental review, but I think it should go a step further and suspend the approval of drilling plans in the Arctic’s Chukchi and Beaufort seas,” said Rep. Lois Capps (CA-23). “The human, economic and environmental catastrophe in the Gulf demonstrates that offshore drilling is a dirty and dangerous business, despite assurances from the oil industry that it’s safe. In representing a community with active offshore drilling, I know first hand that accidents can and do happen. And I also know if it’s this hard to clean-up a spill in the relatively calm conditions of the Gulf, it’s going to be near-impossible to respond to and contain any spill in the Arctic Ocean.”

“With 41 days until Shell’s ships arrive in the Arctic Ocean, we as conservationists and as human rights advocates must do everything possible to prevent any and all development from occurring in this pristine ocean,” said Cindy Shogan, Executive Director of the Alaska Wilderness League. “We greatly appreciate the efforts of the House members to call for this imperative time out.”

“Congress is taking the initiative to protect the Arctic Ocean, and now the President needs to make the call for a time out on Arctic drilling,” said Jessica Ennis, Legislative Associate with Earthjustice. “There are too many uncertainties and risks with drilling in the remote, pristine waters of America’s Arctic Ocean.”

“The tragedy in the Gulf shows how dramatically an oil spill can impact communities, wildlife and the environment -- and that's in a region where it's relatively easy to obtain

and deploy spill response technology,” said Karla Dutton, Alaska Program Director for Defenders of Wildlife. “In the Arctic, where no technology to clean up a spill has yet been invented, the impacts could be even greater. Alaska Native communities and iconic wildlife like the polar bear and bowhead whale should not be placed at risk of a catastrophic spill like the one in the Gulf.”

“The BP oil spill shows us once more the need to end our oil addiction.” said Justin Allegro, Legislative Representative for Wildlife Conservation with the National Wildlife Federation. “The tragedy also reminds us that offshore drilling in environmentally sensitive areas, such as critical habitat for polar bears and other Arctic species is simply not worth the risk. We thank these representatives for asking the Obama administration to heed the lessons learned from this catastrophe and rollback plans to drill in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas.”

“Damage from the on-going disaster in the Gulf of Mexico may last for generations and a hurried review is clearly not sufficient to credibly address the many technical and regulatory concerns that have been brought to light by this spill,” said Brian Moore, Legislative Director, National Audubon Society. “Shell’s plans for new drilling in the Arctic Ocean must be put on hold until the cause of the BP blowout are fully investigated and understood.”

"It's time the Obama Administration woke up to the reality that drilling in the Arctic is even more dangerous than drilling in the gulf," said Rebecca Noblin, Alaska Director, Center for Biological Diversity. "If we want polar bears to survive into the coming century we must not drill in the Arctic."

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