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Senators Fight to Stop Republican Effort to Open Arctic Refuge to Drilling

Republican budget tax plan would open up Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to pay for tax breaks for the super-rich

Washington (October 17, 2017) – Senators Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), Michael Bennet (D-Colo.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), Tom Udall (D-N.M.), Al Franken (D-Minn.), and Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) were joined today by the League of Conservation Voters, Defenders of Wildlife and the Alaska Wilderness League to call for the removal of any language in the Fiscal Year 2018 Republican budget resolution that would allow for drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is the largest unit in the National Wildlife Refuge System. In 1960, President Dwight Eisenhower established the original refuge, which comprised 8.9 million acres, as the Arctic National Wildlife Range. It was later expanded in 1980 to its current 19.6 million acres and renamed the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The 1.56 million-acre Coastal Plain, the biological heart of the Refuge, supports more than 250 species, including caribou, polar bears, grizzly bears, wolves, muskoxen, wolverines, and migratory birds.

“The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of the natural wonders of America, not a piggy bank Republicans can break open to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy,” **said Senator Markey.**

“Opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is nothing more than a Big Oil polar payout. The Republican plan to offset \$1.5 trillion in tax cuts for the super wealthy with \$1 billion in revenue from drilling in the Refuge is a plan that neither makes sense nor raises sufficient cents. This Republican budget scam to hand over the wildest place left in America to Big Oil should be removed from the budget and put on ice.”

“Congress should reject this effort to jam language through the budget to allow drilling in the Arctic Refuge,” **said Senator Bennet.** “Drilling in one of the most spectacular landscapes in America, a place sacred to native tribes and critical for local wildlife – for what amounts to little more than a political stunt – is entirely unacceptable. Instead, we should have a serious, open debate about energy that the American people deserve and that our future demands.”

“Destroying a national wildlife refuge is not the answer to our nation’s energy problems,” **said Senator Cantwell.** “Fortunately, all previous attempts to destroy this pristine arctic ecosystem have failed and we will keep fighting until this attempt fails too.”

“The coastal plain of Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of our country’s natural treasures,” **said Senator Carper.** “As stewards of these places, we have an obligation to protect

our land, water and wildlife. Americans want a cleaner energy future and to leave a better world for their children and grandchildren. Opening up the Refuge to oil drilling to pay for a tax cut is irresponsible and shortsighted, especially at a time of low oil prices when the effects of climate change being felt across our country from unprecedented wildfires to devastating hurricanes. We can't move backwards and put pristine spaces like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge at such unnecessary risk."

"The majestic Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a rare part of our national heritage that is virtually unchanged from how it was 10,000 years ago," **said Senator Udall**. "And we're standing together to fight this rushed and drastic proposal that would change its delicate and unique ecosystem forever. Senate Republicans are using deceptive rhetoric to defend their decision to try to open the Arctic Refuge to energy development. But we're speaking the truth — what the Republicans really want is to find any way possible to give the wealthiest Americans a big tax cut. They're ignoring the voices of the American people who oppose forever degrading the Arctic Refuge, but the American people won't be quiet and neither will we."

"Drilling in the Arctic would be the height of irresponsibility," **said Senator Merkley**. "It's outrageous that Republicans are trying to open up one of the most pristine areas in the world to devastation and destruction, just to help add to polluters' profits. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a treasure that belongs to all Americans, and we must fight back together to save it."

"The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, where caribou still migrate across the landscape by the tens of thousands, is among the most unspoiled places left on this earth," **said Senator Heinrich**. "I've had the privilege of seeing this last great wilderness myself. I've witnessed its polar bears, Dall sheep and moose. I've discussed its importance with native Gwich'in elders in Arctic Village and interested New Mexicans who may or may not see it with their own eyes in this lifetime. There are many places where oil and gas exploration is appropriate. In my view, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge will never be one of them. This is a place worth fighting for."