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The Arctic Refuge fight has just begun

WASHINGTON – The House and Senate have both passed a controversial tax bill with a provision to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, where polar bears den and caribou calve.

Statement by Adam Kolton, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League:

Arctic Refuge drilling may have been useful political grease for GOP leaders but it remains deeply unpopular with the American people. They do not want, did not ask for and will not accept that the wildest place in our country needs to be sacrificed to offset the tiniest fraction of tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires.

History will not judge kindly those who backed this scheme to drill in our nation's largest wildlife refuge. They not only betrayed the once proud Republican conservation legacy of Teddy Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower, but also abandoned any pretense that this will help our energy security. The provision was paired with fire sale of oil from our Strategic Petroleum Reserve and is intended to increase already record high oil exports to China and other countries.

Promised oil and revenues are highly speculative and uncertain but the resolve of those opposed to drilling is not. We will fight to defend the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in the courts, in the corporate boardrooms and in Congress where, over time, we will seek to restore protections for this crown jewel of our National Wildlife Refuge System and for the polar bears, caribou, musk oxen and millions of migratory birds that call it home.

We will continue to stand in solidarity with the Gwich'in people whose cultural and survival depends on the calving grounds they call "the sacred place where life begins." We will stand with those who believe we should confront the realities of climate change in the Arctic and beyond and not exacerbate our oil dependence a decade from now. And we will stand with every American and Alaskan who wants to ensure that we leave at least one portion of the American Arctic coastal landscape intact as a lasting legacy for future generations.

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