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New legislation would repeal disastrous Arctic Refuge tax bill drilling provision

Representative Jared Huffman (D-CA) introduces "Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act"

WASHINGTON – Today, Representative Jared Huffman (D-Calif.), joined by original cosponsors Representatives Raul Grijalva (D-Ariz.), Alan Lowenthal (D-Calif.) and Ruben Gallego (D-Ariz.), introduced the "Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act" in the U.S. House of Representatives that would repeal a provision in the controversial December tax legislation mandating drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Arctic Refuge drilling remains deeply unpopular – more than two-thirds of Americans oppose it. Today's bill repeals that provision and sides with the majority of the America public who do not want, have not asked for, and will not accept sacrificing the wildest place in America for short-sighted, destructive fossil fuel production.

Oil industry allies in Congress used the tax reconciliation bill to circumvent the normal legislative channels because passing an Arctic Refuge drilling bill on its own would have been impossible. In addition, beyond gaining access to one of America's most treasured public lands, big oil companies are among the largest beneficiaries of the tax bill, reaping billions of dollars in tax savings from cuts to corporate income tax rates and the generous tax treatment of capital expenditures.

One of the largest intact ecosystems in the world, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a place of breathtaking natural beauty and untouched, rugged wilderness. Its remarkable glaciated peaks, northern forests and fragile tundra provide vital habitat for denning polar bears, a huge migrating herd of caribou, wolves and muskoxen, and nesting area for more than 200 migratory and resident bird species.

Statement by Representative Jared Huffman (D-Calif.):

"Plain and simple: the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a national treasure worth protecting for future generations," **said Rep. Huffman**. "Although Republicans in Congress snuck a dangerous drilling provision into their tax bill last year, it's not too late to keep drills out of this iconic landscape. But time is not on our side: we need to repeal this oil and gas giveaway soon to ensure that the Arctic Refuge coastal plain remains unspoiled for future generations to experience and enjoy."

Reaction from Indigenous People:

"Enforcing protection of the Refuge is necessary to ensure the lifestyle of the Gwich'in and Inupiaq people is carried on for generations to come," **said Adrienne Titus, Native Movement**. "This rich ecosystem has supported the way of life that has sustained the people of the North since time immemorial. I commend Representative Huffman for introducing this bill and taking the time to

recognize the importance of the Refuge to not only those who have spoken out, but also those whose voices that have not been heard."

"The Gwich'in have an inherent right to continue to live their ancestral way of life as they have since time began," said **Faith Gemmill, Executive Director Resisting Environmental Destruction on Indigenous Lands (REDOIL)**. "Their way of life is dependent on a healthy ecosystem within the Arctic Refuge. There is no way the measure to drill in the Arctic Refuge would have been able to pass if the merits of the issue were debated openly. This new bill would set things right again, and allow open and honest dialogue about one of the Nation's most precious ecosystems, and the Gwich'in who continue to live as they always have. When presented with the truth of the matter, Americans have always chosen wisely to protect this last intact ecosystem of America's Arctic Coast and the thriving Indigenous cultures it supports."

Reaction from Conservation Organizations:

"Drilling in the Arctic Refuge is arguably even more unpopular than the tax bill it was jammed into last December," said **Adam Kolton, executive director of Alaska Wilderness League**. "And in the months since, it has become clear the Trump administration's mad dash to lease is all about beating the political clock with no consideration for the wildlife, wilderness or subsistence values of this cherished landscape. Representative Huffman's repeal bill is an opportunity to right a wrong perpetrated five months ago and restore protections to the wildest place left in America."

"The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a land of incredible beauty, ecological value and cultural importance. Oil rigs have no place there," said **Jamie Rappaport Clark, president and CEO of Defenders of Wildlife**. "The coastal plain is a haven for polar bears, the Porcupine caribou herd, migratory birds that travel from all over the globe and hundreds of other species. We thank our conservation champions in Congress for their commitment to repealing the drilling provision and saving the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from becoming an industrial oilfield."

"We thank Rep. Huffman as well as Reps. Grijalva, Lowenthal and Gallego for taking action to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, as generations of American leaders have done before them," said **Marissa Knodel, Associate Legislative Counsel at Earthjustice**. "Auctioning off this cherished landscape to the fossil fuel industry would be an affront to the culture and traditional practices of the indigenous Gwich'in people, and would further harm iconic wildlife already burdened by the formidable stress of climate change. Emissions from oil and gas extracted from the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge would only worsen global warming, at a time when our highest priority should be transitioning away from fossil fuels and embracing renewable-energy alternatives."

"Congress was incredibly short-sighted to stick language into the tax bill calling for oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge," said **Erik DuMont, Environment America's Stop Drilling Campaign Director**. "We applaud Sen. Markey and Rep. Huffman for their efforts to repeal this portion of the law and prevent looming threats to this national treasure. Choosing to prioritize a little more oil over this pristine land further imperils polar bears, caribou, wolves, muskoxen and close to 200 species of birds, and is unnecessary given the increasing abundance and competitiveness of clean, renewable energy sources."

"When Congress passed this law, they did so legally," said **Julianne Warren of the Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition Council**. "They did not, however, do it out in the open, democratically. This law

disrespects Alaska Native tribal voices--particularly the Gwich'in Nation, united in adamant opposition--who would be most directly affected by drilling. This law disregards the will of a large majority—seventy percent—of U.S. registered voters who do not want drilling in the public lands of the Arctic Refuge. This law must be repealed, and we must place time and resources into a commitment towards a just transition focused on regenerative energies and economies.”

“The American people oppose the desecration of the Coastal Plain of Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the crown jewel of our natural heritage,” **said Dr. David C. Raskin, President of the Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges.** “Short-sighted politicians and corporate interests used a back-door method to tack this travesty onto a highly regressive and publicly unpopular piece of legislation that rewards the oil giants and the wealthy at the expense of this pristine habitat that supports the magnificent wildlife that are critical for the traditional lifestyle of the Gwich'in People. Repeal of this unconscionable provision is imperative to preserve the Arctic Refuge in all of its wildness and natural splendor.”

“The destructive provision to turn the pristine Arctic National Wildlife Refuge into an oil field never belonged in the tax bill in the first place,” **said League of Conservation Voters Deputy Legislative Director Alex Taurel.** “Drilling in the Arctic Refuge is an assault on the way of life of the Gwich'in people, and we commend Representatives Huffman, Grijalva, Lowenthal and Gallego for their work to repeal this wildly unpopular provision and protect one of the last truly untouched places on earth.”

“The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is an iconic national treasure that provides important habitat for over 200 bird species that migrate across the United States and to six continents,” **said Sarah Greenberger, senior vice president of conservation policy at National Audubon Society.** “For decades this incredibly-wild and biologically-diverse landscape was protected from oil and gas development by Democrats and Republicans. Audubon applauds this bill and similar efforts to restore that vital protection for the Arctic Refuge and the birds, wildlife, and people that rely on it.”

“This legislation would reverse the recent terrible decision by Congress to open the iconic Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas operations and drilling. Thank you Representative Huffman for this action to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge,” **said Geoffrey L Haskett, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association.**

“This legislation would right a wrong, just in the nick of time,” **said Niel Lawrence, director of the Alaska project at the Natural Resources Defense Council.** “It was a total abuse of process for Congress to use the tax bill to slip this environmental and cultural attack past the American people. A ‘refuge’ is a place that protects and endures—not a place to conduct dangerous seismic testing and carve up for fossil fuel production.”

"After a scheming process to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge coastal plain to drilling, this administration continues to ignore the voices of millions of Americans, and Alaskans in particular," **said Lisa Baraff, Program Director at the Northern Alaska Environmental Center.** “The Arctic Refuge should never have been included in this tax bill, and we support efforts to remove it. Keeping the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge off-limits to oil and gas development is a moral and climate imperative. We must listen to the Gwich'in Nation and respect this place as irreplaceable and intimately tied to their culture and identity. Now is the time to fully support protecting the Arctic Refuge.”

"The American people and some of the world's most significant investors know that drilling in the Arctic Refuge is a terrible idea. It would threaten the food security and human rights of the Gwich'in people,

contribute to climate change, and permanently destroy one of the world's last wild places, all for the benefit of corporate polluters," **said Sierra Club Lands Protection Program Director Athan Manuel.** "Now Congress has a chance to undo the dangerous and short-sighted decision to sell off this special place to corporate polluters. We applaud Representative Huffman for his leadership in protecting America's Refuge."

"We are grateful to Representative Huffman and other principled leaders in Congress for fighting against the Trump administration's actions to destroy one of America's last pristine wild places and restore protections for the Arctic Refuge," **said Jamie Williams, president of The Wilderness Society.** "Protecting the refuge is vital to the survival of the Gwich'in people, and we owe it to our children and grandchildren to ensure that drills never mar this beautiful landscape."

"Public lands must be managed for the benefit of all Americans, not for the profit of a few select corporations," **said Helen Cherullo, executive director of Braided River.** "The natural, cultural, and spiritual value of wildlife refuges transcends dollars, and should not be squandered. It was a cynical and calculated political maneuver to bury and disguise drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as the highest purpose of a wildlife refuge. Surely there were more viable options available to support this so-called tax reform bill."

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