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**Statement by Alaska Wilderness League, Braided River, Big Wild Advocates, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Earthjustice, Environment America, Eyak Preservation Council, Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, Gwich'in Steering Committee, Hip Hop Caucus, Land is Life, League of Conservation Voters, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Refuge Association, National Wildlife Federation, Natural Resources Defense Council, Northern Alaska Environmental Center, Pacific Environment, Sierra Club, Wild Advocates, The Wilderness Society and Wilderness Watch:**

Oil drilling proponents should hold off on celebrating. The American people did not ask for our nation's largest and wildest refuge to be exploited for a speculative fix of oil intended for export. And they won't stand for it. This Arctic drilling measure passed, not because of popular sentiment or careful scrutiny, but because it was buried deep inside larger tax legislation designed to avoid a full, fair and open debate. Most Americans are only now becoming aware that this historically tragic drilling mandate, promising false revenues paid for in part by raiding 5 million barrels of emergency oil supplies, is packaged in this monstrous bill.

Those members who supported this tax scheme voted to end protections for an area first set aside more than a half-century ago by Republican President Dwight Eisenhower. They abdicated their responsibility to leave this great nation better for our children and grandchildren, putting at risk a national treasure for no benefit, except to grease passage of a tax bill that will further explode the deficit.

We will remember their names and we will remember their votes.

Oil companies that may now seek to drill the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge will have to consider the impact on their reputations and should expect a backlash from shareholders and investors. They will need to evaluate the unfavorable economics and geology that have already led many in the industry to question the expense and viability of Arctic Refuge drilling. And they will have to account for the fact that there are millions of consumers prepared to abandon companies that shun pristine environments or the rights of Native people. The Gwich'in call the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge "the sacred place where life begins." We will stand with them, at every step, to defend the calving ground of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and their way of life.

While today's vote was a setback, it has only heightened our resolve to defend America's last great wilderness. We will 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 not rest. We will not yield. And we will not for a moment forsake our commitment to defend this irreplaceable, iconic and deeply cherished place.

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