

Chapter 1: ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES & POLICIES

Pages 54-56: TAX LEGISLATION OPENS ANWR TO OIL DRILLING, TRUMP INTERIOR DEPARTMENT RUSHES TO COMPLETE ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWS

On December 22, 2017, President Trump signed into law the Tax Cut and Jobs Act of 2017, which contains a provision opening ANWR to oil drilling. The provision was added at the behest of Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, a long-time supporter of drilling ANWR in order to increase royalties to be received by the state of Alaska. The bill passed the Senate by a vote of 51-48 under a “reconciliation” procedure that avoided the need to obtain 60 votes to overcome a filibuster. It was argued that because the measure would raise revenue from oil royalties it was germane to the tax bill. At a White House celebration following passage of the tax cut legislation, President Trump boasted that he had been able to overcome more than 40 years of opposition to opening ANWR and he congratulated Alaska’s long-time Congressman Donald Young, though calling him “Dan” by mistake. It will take some time before any actual drilling is done in ANWR, but the Bureau of Land Management is moving swiftly to process a permit for seismic testing to locate oil, overriding objections from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife that inadequate environmental reviews have been conducted. See Dino Grandoni, Trump Administration Moves Forward with Arctic Oil Plan Wildlife Staff Deem “Not Adequate,” Washington Post, August 21, 2018,

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/the-energy-202/2018/08/21/the-energy-202-trump-administration-moves-forward-with-arctic-oil-plan-wildlife-officials-deem-not-adequate/5b7af94f1b326b7234392a70/?utm_term=.9d46e8b84e4a

On Monday December 3, 2018, the New York Times reported that the Trump administration is rushing to jump start oil drilling in ANWR by accelerating environmental reviews that are necessary before drilling permits can be issued. Henry Fountain and Steve Eder, “In the Blink of an Eye, a Hunt for Oil Threatens Pristine Alaska,” N.Y. Times, Dec. 3, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/03/us/oil-drilling-arctic-national-wildlife-refuge.html>. The article reports that during the Obama administration “the environmental review of drilling prospects in another part of Alaska ran well over 1,000 pages and took two and a half years to complete.” However, the Trump administration is planning to complete an environmental impact statement (EIS) for drilling in ANWR by next spring, one year after it started the process, and to limit the EIS to a few hundred pages. Interior Department officials argue that it is possible to accelerate the review process because ANWR has been extensively studied in the past. However, scientists with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report that the process has been so rushed that they often had less than 48 hours to comment on drafts and that their comments have been ignored. To further accelerate approval of seismic testing for oil, the Interior Department is performing an environmental assessment (EA) of the impact of such testing, a process that it expects to complete in only a few months.