

If Democrats Controlled the House...

A Weekly Taste of Their Legislative Agenda



Proposal: H.R. 139, Udall-Eisenhower Arctic Wilderness Act

Sponsor: Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA)

Summary: This proposed law would designate the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as “wilderness” and a component of the National Wilderness Preservation System, thereby preventing energy exploration in the region.

Problems with the Bill: This legislation seeks to permanently prevent companies from drilling for energy in ANWR. The idea of instituting an absolute ban on energy exploration in the area for the apparent purposes of environmental protection is both harmful and unnecessary. Proponents of this and similar legislation suggest that setting up a monitored oil rig in ANWR would have an enormous and irreparable environmental effect on the Alaskan wilderness. These suggestions are false—ANWR is enormous and there are responsible methods of exploration which would not despoil even the relatively tiny amount of land on which the energy exploration would occur. This perspective makes it clear that energy exploration can be undertaken in Alaska in a way which is reasonable without “despoiling the unique Arctic coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge,” as the bill suggests. Energy exploration is occurring right now throughout wildlife refuges across the country; there’s no reason that responsible exploration and production could not happen in ANWR.

This recognition is important in light of the enormous benefits of energy exploration on even a relatively tiny amount of the area in question. USGS [estimated](#) that this area contains between 4.3 and 11.8 billion barrels of oil. The number of jobs which could be directly created by drilling in Alaska, and the amount by which the drilling could eventually lower energy prices in the United States, are both considerable. Even setting aside its alignment with the President’s war on American energy independence, then, this legislation would present a direct assault on American jobs and energy prices. Additionally, as Rep. Upton pointed out in a [letter to President Obama](#), an ICF International Study for the American Petroleum Institute in 2008 estimated that an open ANWR would ultimately increase government revenue in excess of \$164 billion.

Conservatives can generally agree that protecting the environment is a noble and important goal, but this bill goes too far. We cannot afford to prevent all responsible methods of energy exploration off of our northern coasts based on the insistence of radical environmental groups.