

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Natural Resources

Washington, DC 20515

April 19, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We are very concerned with the needless haste with which the Department of the Interior (DOI) is advancing towards an oil and gas lease sale on the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Arctic Refuge). The recent issuance of the Notice of Intent for scoping the draft Environmental Impact Statement for a lease sale, combined with recent statements made by high-ranking officials in your Department, indicates that your Department apparently intends to conduct a lease sale as early as next year, more than two years prior to the four-year deadline included in H.R. 1, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

We remain staunchly opposed to oil and gas activities on the Coastal Plain, and believe that inclusion of the Arctic Refuge leasing provision in H.R. 1 behind closed doors was improper and contrary to the majority sentiment in Congress and among the American people regarding leasing and drilling in the Refuge. However, as long as that provision is in law, we expect that the Department will live up to the standard expressed by Senator Murkowski when she said, "If we are allowed to move forward with development, we will do it right. We will take care of our lands. We will take care of our wildlife. We will take care of our people."¹ While truly taking care of our lands and wildlife would involve repealing the Arctic Refuge leasing provision in H.R. 1, at the very least it indicates that any leasing that does occur should be conducted extremely carefully and only after the most robust possible environmental review. Attempting to rush the leasing process, as DOI is doing, is unnecessary, inappropriate, and likely to result in serious harm to one of our nation's last remaining truly wild areas.

This rush is especially egregious because it has clearly been stated in the press that the goal of this timeline is to meet the purely political deadline of holding a lease sale within this presidential term.² Playing politics with our nation's most important and irreplaceable public lands is irresponsible, and this effort is wholly incompatible with your responsibility to move forward in a way that is compatible with protecting the wilderness and wildlife values of the Refuge and the needs of the Gwich'in people.

The Arctic Refuge is one of our nation's most majestic public lands, home to musk oxen, wolves, polar bears and nearly 200 species of migratory birds that stop in the Refuge to eat, molt,

¹ Senate Floor Debate on H.R. 1, November 30, 2017.

² Energy & Environment Publishing, LLC, *Road map for ANWR drilling gets clearer*, March 12, 2018.

and nest in route to and from six continents and all 50 states. Its biological heart, the Coastal Plain, is relied upon by the Porcupine Caribou Herd for important calving and post-calving habitat. The Coastal Plain is also sacred to the Gwich'in people because of its importance for caribou. Given the complexity and confusion of the legal structure under which this program was approved, the iconic wilderness quality of these lands, the important and deeply interconnected wildlife and biological resources of the Coastal Plain, and the significant impact to the Gwich'in culture, setting arbitrary deadlines and page limits for a complex environmental analysis, as Deputy Secretary Bernhardt mandated through Order Number 3355, is no way for Interior to proceed.

For decades, millions of Americans have voiced their strong support for protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. As one of our nation's most iconic public lands, oil and gas development in the Arctic Refuge is not an Alaska issue — it is a national issue. Yet no public hearing opportunities are offered outside of Alaska. We urge you to provide opportunities for public testimony for the millions of Americans across the country who care immensely about protecting this special place.

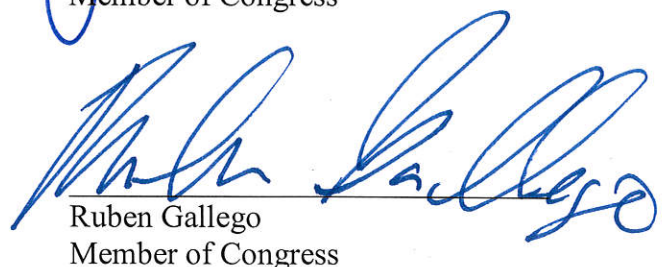
We stand with the strong majority of the American people in opposing oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. We will be watching this process closely to ensure that DOI meets the letter and spirit of every aspect of the law. The Arctic Refuge is too important to sacrifice for short-sighted development.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress


Jared Huffman
Member of Congress


Alan S. Lowenthal
Member of Congress


Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress


Nanette Diaz Barragan
Member of Congress


Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

A. Donald McEachin

A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

Niki Tsongas

Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress

Darren Soto

Darren Soto
Member of Congress