

May 26, 2006

## House Again Passes Measure to Allow Oil Drilling in Alaska Wildlife Refuge

By MICHAEL JANOFFSKY

With gasoline prices around \$3 a gallon as the Memorial Day weekend approaches, the House again voted Thursday to approve drilling for oil and gas in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

It was at least the 12th time that the House had voted to allow energy exploration in a small piece of the preserve's 19 million acres along the northern coastal plain of Alaska. The final tally was 225 to 201, with 27 Democrats joining the majority and 30 Republicans voting against.

But given the Senate's recent disposition toward drilling in the Arctic, the vote may be little more than symbolic.

Since 1995, when Congress passed an arctic drilling bill and President Bill Clinton vetoed it, Senate proponents of drilling have failed to gather the 60 votes needed to end a filibuster against it. The outcome is expected to be no different this year.

Drilling in the Arctic has become a major fault line in the debate over how to wean the nation from foreign oil and bring down gasoline prices.

Backers of the drilling contend that the promise of 10.3 billion barrels of oil would lead to greater energy independence and job creation. Opponents say that the risk of spills and other environmental damage outweighs the benefits and that drilling for oil delays the development of alternative fuels.

"A vote against energy production in ANWR is a vote for increasing our dependence on foreign oil and sending good American jobs overseas -- two things we simply cannot do anymore," said Representative Richard W. Pombo, a California Republican who is chairman of the House Resources Committee and the bill's sponsor.

But Representative Alcee L. Hastings, Democrat of Florida, said the bill represented "the triumph of politics over geology" and would not reduce the price of gas at the pump.

Representative John W. Olver, Democrat of Massachusetts, said, "It will be five years at best, and probably eight years, before the first barrel of oil flows" if drilling is allowed.

Energy Secretary Samuel W. Bodman applauded the House vote, but the administration was dealt a setback on Wednesday night, when the House voted on spending for one of President Bush's signature energy initiatives, the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership.

In providing \$24.4 billion for the Energy Department -- about \$300 million more than the administration requested and \$327 million above current spending -- lawmakers gave Mr. Bush \$120 million for the partnership, less than half the \$250 million he had sought.

Under the plan, the United States and Russia would provide reactor fuel to other countries and reclaim the spent fuel to assure that it would not be used for weapons. The administration is advancing the plan as a way

to promote expanding the use of nuclear fuel in the United States.

Senator Pete V. Domenici, Republican of New Mexico and chairman of the Senate energy committee, vowed to reverse the House, saying, "I plan to restore full funding for G.N.E.P. and go looking for more."