

Drilling in Alaska an energy solution

By RICHARD W. POMBO

Georgia uses about 22.3 million gallons of oil per day. Gasoline for cars, diesel for trucks and school buses and fuel for jets at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport all come from oil. If the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's oil potential was used for Georgia alone, it would supply all of the state's needs for almost 54 years. All for the temporary use of 2,000 federal acres of land that are permanently frozen for most of the year.

As chairman of the committee in Congress with jurisdiction over ANWR and all public lands and offshore waters, I have visited ANWR in winter and summer. I met with Inupiat Eskimos who live in ANWR and support energy development there. I visited oil field operations in Prudhoe Bay, ANWR's neighbor and home to America's two largest oilfields.

I learned that this issue has little to do with facts, and everything to do with rhetoric, symbolism and shoddy journalism. I think this does our nation and its citizens a disservice, and is dangerous to our national security and economic growth.

Here are some facts that are irrefutable. The United States has about 22 billion barrels of proven oil reserves. According to the departments of Interior and Energy, during the Clinton administration ANWR had 10.4 billion barrels of oil that could be produced at today's prices.

My legislation, which would allow 2,000 acres of ANWR's federal land to be disturbed temporarily (and required to be reclaimed), could increase oil reserves by almost 50 percent.

ANWR's 10.4 billion barrels represents twice as much oil as all of Texas; Oklahoma has 556 million barrels of oil; Louisiana 564 million barrels. Anyone who tells you that ANWR's oil is insignificant to America is misinformed or misleading.

Will ANWR exploration hurt the caribou? Thirty years of experience at Prudhoe Bay says no. Since oil was discovered there, caribou have increased from around 3,000 animals to more than 30,000.

Done correctly, energy production and animals can quite easily coexist. The Inupiat Eskimo of Kaktovik, in ANWR, agree.

ANWR won't solve all of our nation's energy problems. It is, however, our best chance to discover world-class deposits of oil that will help reduce oil imports and produce hundreds of thousands of good jobs, rather than sending our dollars and jobs overseas.

ANWR is a part of the solution to our energy problems. It is time for politicians to stop playing special-interest politics and do what is right for America.