

The Hill

October 21, 2003 Tuesday

Special Section Energy

Arctic drilling can be safe, cut dependence

By Rep. Richard Pombo (R-Calif.)

Ingenuity, hard work and affordable energy made this country what it is today. In the past decade alone, those forces have produced major breakthroughs in AIDS research, led development of the World Wide Web and discovered a cure for blindness.

Yes, blindness. Scientists report that an artificial retina, which uses advanced microchip technology to gather light, will someday help people see again. Successes such as those remind us that when Americans harness energy and ingenuity, anything is possible.

From aviation to healthcare, the United States has led the world in progress and innovation. However, if we are going to continue our leadership, we must increase our supplies of reliable and affordable domestic energy. Safe exploration and production in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) is our best bet.

The mean estimate of economically recoverable oil in ANWR is 10.3 billion barrels. By comparison, that is more than double the total proven reserves in the state of Texas and almost half of America's total reserve of 22.3 billion barrels.

At today's prices, that is \$300 billion we would not be sending overseas, funding governments and regimes that hate Americans. Also, it represents a staggering \$120 billion in tax revenue the federal treasury could put toward healthcare, prescription drugs, education or Social Security. And those 2,000 acres on the North Slope of Alaska could create more than 1 million good jobs in the United States.

Despite that great potential, a faction in Congress would have us believe that although advanced technology can cure the blind, it cannot be used to ensure environmentally safe energy exploration in ANWR.

That faction and fanatics in the environmental fundraising community continue to willfully and purposely ignore the facts. Their scare tactics would have you believe we can't, when the science and technology says we can.

Their direct-mail pieces will tell you production harms the caribou, even though herd populations have increased from 3,000 to 32,000 since production began in Prudhoe Bay. They'll tell you there is not enough oil in ANWR to justify exploration, even though the field is likely to be the biggest ever discovered in the United States.

They might even tell you that we consume too much of the world's energy and have little of its supplies, even though our economy fuels one-third of the world's economic output. Finally, they'll tell you we should rely solely on conservation, even

though you can't conserve your way out of an empty tank of gas. After all, why would they present the facts when the scare tactics net them tens of millions in fundraising campaigns?

The truth is, despite popular misconceptions, energy production and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive. The Clinton administration's 1999 Department of Energy report "Environmental Benefits of Advanced Oil and Gas Exploration and Production Technology" documents the innovations that make energy production and environmental protection achievable - even in the Arctic.

Ice roads and ice pads allow highly trained experts to conduct their work without any impact on the frozen tundra below. In addition, advanced 3-D seismic, 4-D visualization and remote sensing technologies drastically reduce the number of wells required to develop the resource, thereby lessening the amount of potential surface disturbance.

That's why legislation in Congress targets production to only 2,000 (or 0.01 percent) of

ANWR's 19.6 million acres. To put that into perspective, the size of the average farm in South Dakota is more than 1,400 acres.

Even the location lends an argument for safe exploration. The area in which development would occur is on the northern slope, frozen and completely without sunlight for several months of the year. Except for the Inupiat Eskimo families, the northern slope is uninhabited.

Most important, the Inupiat and 75 percent of all Alaskans want responsible production of energy on their lands. The alternative, increasing imports from Third World countries that produce it recklessly, is irresponsible and unacceptable.

If we in Congress accept the argument that we can't explore for more energy in ANWR, it will be a sad political commentary. Technology and American workers will enable us to produce energy in ANWR with incredible environmental safety.

A clear vision for the future security and economic vitality of this nation demands that we start doing just that.

Pombo is chairman of the House Committee on Resources.