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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Resources
Washington, DC 20515

August 17, 2004

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The Honorable Gale A. Norton
Secretary
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

RE: Comments for the Record on the Northeast National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska
Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Secretary Norton:

I write in support of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to amend its 1998 Northeast National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska (NPRO) plan to increase energy production while ensuring environmental protections. Such updates are prudent, and indicate a proactive government approach to improving plans when new science and information is brought to bear. The BLM is to be commended for attempting to add to America's domestic supplies of energy at a time when oil prices have hit all-time highs and domestic production is lower than at any time since World War II.

The National Petroleum Reserve was set aside in 1923 specifically for the production of energy. It now represents one of our best opportunities for world class oil and natural gas supplies, which would lessen our dependence on foreign nations and increase our national economic growth. Therefore, it is a testament to the absurd that national environmental fundraising groups have mounted a campaign to oppose petroleum production in America's petroleum reserve.

The National Petroleum Reserve belongs to the taxpayers and energy consumers of America, and they have every right to enjoy safe, secure and affordable energy – and the jobs energy production would create – from the Petroleum Reserve. Attempting to withhold this great energy asset from all Americans – currently reeling from high energy prices – for the mercenary gain of a few organizations who thrive on the creation of conflict, is irresponsible. It does, however, give American consumers a glimpse of the special interest groups which champion causes that lead to higher energy prices and a weaker economy.

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The 1998 plan was flawed and reflected a strong bias against energy production. It failed to consider available means that allowed for protection of the environment while providing the energy necessary to provide America with affordable energy supplies. It is no coincidence that the 1998 plan was approved by the same Administration officials who advised President Clinton to veto legislation opening the Coastal Plain of ANWR to environmentally sound oil and natural gas development in 1995. Energy production from Alaska's North Slope could be increasing today, instead of decreasing, had their anti-affordable energy program not been adopted by President Clinton. It is a shame that Americans pay so much for their energy today because their government was daydreaming at the energy switch in the 1990's.

The BLM's preferred alternative is a cautious, science-based application of new technology and empirical knowledge of arctic energy production techniques. It would make available an additional 1.5 billion barrels of oil to our nation's supply, over twice as much as the proven reserves of New Mexico, our nation's 4th largest State in terms of oil reserves. At today's oil price, this is more than \$65 billion that will be spent in the United States, rather than being transferred to unfriendly foreign nations whose policies threaten our national security.

As a Representative from California, oil from the Alaska Petroleum Reserve represents a safe and secure supply of oil to our refineries on the West Coast which will help moderate the decline in supplies from other domestic sources and enable struggling refining capacity to remain in place in my State. This is important to job retention and generation in California.

The performance-based stipulations in the proposal which stem from decades of North Slope experience with fish, wildlife and their habitats ensure that the human environment will be protected. Moreover, the revenues generated from activity in the region will assist local governments in meeting the needs of their young people and their elders. Additional throughput on the Trans Alaska Pipeline because of added production from the Petroleum Reserve should lead to reductions in the per barrel tariff, which should make existing production from declining fields more economic, ensuring the conservation of oil and gas resources in North America's most prodigious oil fields on Alaska's North Slope.

I commend the Administration for taking a very positive step towards the creation of new jobs, new wealth and new energy for the American people. I urge you to adopt the preferred alternative – at a minimum – for the benefit of the United States.

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposal to update the plan for the Petroleum Reserve. Thank you also for taking administrative actions to increase the nation's energy security and provide affordable domestic energy for American consumers, consistent with President Bush's National Energy Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Pombo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "R".

RICHARD W. POMBO
Chairman