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Floor Statement on Opposition to Pipeline Across Alaska

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No. 55

OPPOSITION TO PIPELINE ACROSS ALASKA

Mr. MUSKIE. Mr. President, on Monday I wrote to President Nixon calling on him to instruct the Secretary of Interior to deny immediately the application for a permit to construct a pipeline across Alaska from the North Slope oil fields to the port of Valdez.

My decision was not reached lightly. I have studied carefully the environmental implication of the proposed pipeline route and have examined suggested alternatives.

On the basis of reasons listed in my letter to the President and the specific information included in this more detailed discussion, I am convinced that unacceptable risks are posed by the pipeline and the tanker transport which would move the oil from Alaska to the west coast.

Unless the oil companies are able to satisfy the President and the Congress that a safe alternative is available, no pipeline should be built. Fortunately, it appears that a trans-Canada route may present greatly reduced risks while providing oil and gas to the fuel-short Midwestern United States and protecting our national security from the risks of ocean transport.

If the permit application is denied, this and other alternatives will be explored. No other course is acceptable. Deferral of action will only encourage the applicants. The President should insist on decisive rejection now.

I ask unanimous consent to include in the Record at the conclusion of my statement the text of my letter to the President and supplemental information which identifies the reasons for my concern.

There being no objection, the items were ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

U.S. SENATE,
Washington, D.C.

The President,
The White House,
Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: I am deeply concerned by the continuous delay to take action on the permit application by Alyeska Pipeline Company to construct a pipeline from Alaska's north slope oil fields to the Port of Valdez.

I believe you should instruct the Secretary of the Interior to deny their permit application at once. Such a decision is necessary, indeed essential, if we are to prevent grave environmental damage to the lands the pipeline would traverse, the fishing resources of Prince William Sound and the waters of the Northern Pacific on which the oil would inevitably spill. Such a decision is essential if serious consideration is to be given to alternatives of bringing the Alaska oil and gas to American markets via the pipeline route through Canada.

So long as there is prospect, in the future, of approval of the oil companies present plans we cannot really expect development of alternatives which would better serve the public interest.

A considerable amount of information with respect to the Alaskan oil pipeline has been made public. In that regard, the Interior Department's draft, "Environmental Impact Statement" has served a most useful function. It's weakness in attempting to justify the project has dramatically underscored the reasons why the permit application should be denied immediately. More significantly, when the Corps of Engineers, the Department of Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency reject the pipeline for environmental reasons it is time to call a halt.

Furthermore, available information indicates that the proposed trans-Alaska route will not optimize our national security, that it will not provide the cheapest source of clean fuel, that it would not assure a supply of natural gas which is in greater demand, and that it will not minimize environmental damage. I believe, on the basis of the outstanding questions listed below as well as other available information, we must conclude that construction of the proposed Trans-Alaska Pipeline would violate many of the most fundamental interests of the American public and must not be permitted.

In the three years since oil was discovered on the North Slope, has there been a searching examination of the best way to develop Alaskan oil resources, in the context of long-range national needs for balanced use of our energy resources, and in harmony with a clean environment?

Are not the needs for fuel greatest in the Midwest and Eastern Markets?

Would not the Canadian route provide greater volumes of oil and gas to the United States in years ahead?

What are the real alternatives to the present pipeline route?

Are there others that the Administration has failed to examine?

How is it that after three years, the Interior Department is apparently still willing to consider a permit, and a construction of a pipeline crossing some of the worst earthquake areas in North America when an alternative through Canada could avoid this central fault area?

How is it that after three years, the Interior Department is apparently still willing to approve a plan that crosses an unusually large number of virgin arctic rivers and streams, when a Canadian alternative could utilize a route where a pipeline is already planned (the MacKenzie River), and where the potential for catastrophe of pollution and environmental disruption could be greatly reduced.

Why has the potential for catastrophic oil spill along the western coast of Canada and United States been essentially ignored?

How is it that neither the present pipeline nor its alternatives have been discussed in detail and in advance with the Canadian government?

Why did we wait for three years and a Canadian request for formal talks, which occurred on February 25, to discuss Canadian concern over potential oil pollution of the Western Coast of Canada?

Why, indeed, has the Administration not considered carefully the security risk of a water-based route for oil transport, when an overland route through Canada would be more difficult to attack, would bring natural gas and oil directly to the Midwest where need is greatest, would make best multiple use of a single river corridor, and would entirely avoid the hazards of ocean spills and earthquakes? Such an alternative, which the Canadian government appears interested in considering, would provide an opportunity to join with our northern neighbor in a sensible energy plan, truly serving the interests of the inhabitants of North America.

On the basis of these unresolved questions, the step which this government should take—and take at once—is to make clear that the oil companies have chosen the wrong route—that no permit is going to be issued for a pipeline across Alaska and that we intend to join with the Canadians in resolving any uncertainties which remain regarding a United States-Canadian route.

I urge you to make an early decision on this issue.

Sincerely,

EDMUND S. MUSKIE.

THE PROPOSED TRANS-ALASKA PIPELINE (Supplementary statement of Senator EDMUND MUSKIE)

The proposal under discussion concerns constructing an 800 mile long oil pipeline across Alaska to harvest the deposits of Alaska's North Slope. Some 641 miles of the proposed pipeline route cross Federal lands whose first lien of ownership is retained by Alaska Natives and whose use falls squarely under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970, and a number of other environmental laws.

The route of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, (as proposed by Alyeska, the consortium seeking a right-of-way permit) would go from Prudhoe Bay on Alaska's arctic coast south to Port Valdez on Prince William Sound. The potential for oil spills into coastal waters at either end is awesome. The port at Valdez is unusually narrow, with frequent fog and storms, making it unusually vulnerable to tanker collisions. The tankers now being built to carry oil from this port are 16 times larger than those that caused the recent San Francisco spill, and would take up to one-half hour to bring to a full stop once danger is sighted. Along the Kenai peninsula just west of Valdez, there were close to 100

oil pollution incidents between 1966 and 1968, including a tanker accident which released 63,000 gallons of oil into the water.

Furthermore, because of the tremendous amount of oil to be transported by tanker, some 6-12 barrels worth of oil will be released into Prince William Sound daily as ballast discharge, even after the ballast is diluted to the level specified by the Interior Department and by State water quality standards. These oil fractions will contain the most toxic components of crude oil, and spread rapidly through the water. Fish and shellfish production in Prince William Sound will be gravely affected, which the Interior Department estimates has a potential wholesale value of \$24 million a year.

The port at Valdez was the site of the serious Alaskan earthquake and subsequent tidal waves of 1964. In addition, the danger of tidal waves from landslides is an ever-present danger to the region: the 1720-foot high wave that struck the southeast coast of Alaska in 1958 was the fifth such wave to hit the region in 100 years. A University of Montana geologist considers the risk at Valdez to be comparable.

Earthquakes or tidal waves could cause the release of up to 20 million barrels of oil from storage tanks at the terminus as well as damaging or sinking tankers in the harbor. But Valdez is only the southern tip of a highly active seismic region which the pipeline must cross. About 20 earthquakes of a magnitude of 5 or more on the Richter scale are recorded in Alaska each year. The recent Los Angeles earthquake registered 6.8 on this scale. The Interior Department report states that the southern two-thirds of the proposed pipeline route is subject to large earthquakes of a magnitude of 7 or greater.

The amount of land displacement occurring during an earthquake is even more relevant to the danger of pipeline breakage than is the magnitude of the quake. Land was offset by as much as 40 feet by the Alaskan earthquakes of 1964, yet no stipulations are proposed to require pipeline design to take into account an earthquake of this magnitude.

If the pipeline break does occur, cut-off valves are designed to isolate the broken segment. But the oil which could be spilled from a single segment would amount to 100 times the amount of oil spilled off the coast of Santa Barbara in 1969.

Microwave stations are to be used to communicate breaks in the pipeline, yet microwave towers become useless if even slightly misaligned, as by minor earthquakes.

Furthermore, the planned aerial surveillance may prove unduly hazardous through much of the fierce arctic winter. It is important to know what plans Alyeska has to keep the pipeline area clear for aerial surveillance. The U. S. Army maintains aerial surveillance of its 625-mile Alaskan pipeline running from Haines to Fairbanks by spraying the right-of-way with herbicides and soil sterilizers. A number of selective and non-selective pesticides are used, including 2, 4, 5-T. This last pesticide was the subject of extensive hearings last year in the Commerce Committee in which evidence was presented for the role of fractions of this pesticide in causing birth defects. Quite apart from the Army's use of this chemical I am moved to ask what plans Alyeska has for clearing and maintaining a pipeline right-of-way free of vegetation during its 25 years of operation. Will chemical defoliants be used? What will their long-term effects be?

The Haines-Fairbanks pipeline provides some interesting insights into problems encountered with cold-region pipelines. Because of the nature of Arctic soil, buried portions of the Haines pipeline have been plagued with corrosion problems, having caused at least six spills since 1964. A spill due to cor-

¹ Other laws include Water Quality Improvement Act of 1970, National Plan for Hazardous Materials, Mineral Leasing Act, Rivers and Harbors Act of 1890, Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act.

rosion of the pipe in 1963 caused significant damage to Dezadeash Lake in Canada. Cathodic protection against corrosion is proposed by Alyeska. Yet, I will submit for the Record at the conclusion of these remarks an article reporting an Army Corps of Engineers study challenging the reliability of current technology to protect against corrosion.

Inadequate attention has been paid to potentially catastrophic oil spills along the northwest coast of Canada and the United States, after tankers leave Port Valdez. Apparently some oil will be taken to Puget Sound for refining, and then transported by tanker southward, exposing thousands of miles of coastline, and our major harbors, to the risk of tanker collisions and oil spills of disastrous proportions. Oil spilled in cold Alaskan waters is particularly slow to degrade. Furthermore, the Canadian government has indicated concern with the risk of increased oil spills along their coast. Proceeding in opposition to Canadian interests will certainly strain relations between the United States and Canada.

There is little concrete information on Alyeska's members plans, if any, for transporting the oil from the West coast to major markets where the need is greatest. It has been reported that oil may be transported east from Puget Sound by still another pipeline across North Cascades of Washington, and wilderness areas of the Idaho and Montana Rockies.

The proposed pipeline is expected to cross five major rivers and 350 streams in Alaska. The Yukon River which drains hundreds of thousands of square miles in Alaska is crossed several times by the pipeline near its sources. An oil spill into these rivers will be spread rapidly and widely through the vast waterways of Alaska, endangering wildlife, fish resources and spawning grounds. The increased siltation of rivers by construction run-off is expected to interfere with breeding by salmon and other fishes, which are sensitive to minute changes in the chemical composition of the water.

Slight changes in the delicate balance of the tundra will compound ecological effects rapidly. Melting of the permanently frozen soil by hot oil spilling over the ground, will release substantial amounts of water and extensive areas will become muddy swamp-land, killing the lichens upon which Alaska's caribou and other game feed. Nesting sites of birds may be disturbed. Bird species from all over the Western Hemisphere nest in the Arctic during the summer season, so that the impact on bird life would be felt far beyond the borders of Alaska.

The pipeline project will, of course, disturb the soil and vegetation during turmoil of construction. The Alyeska company has proposed to plant non-native grass species on the disturbed ground to prevent further erosion. Admirable as this may be, no long-term experimental data are available to test whether these introduced plants will spread and overtake the native vegetation. No information on the ecological effects of these studies are available lasting more than two growing seasons. Without adequate ecological study the full impact on birds, caribou, and other wildlife will not be known and this lack of information can be disastrous. It took the introduction of but one prickly-pear cactus to Australia to cause the vast spread of this cactus across that continent, decimating thousands of square miles of sheep pasture. Alaska cannot afford this lack of foresight.

The construction road from the Yukon River north to Prudhoe Bay will invite the addition of a crisscrossed pattern of roads and land development subjecting northern Alaska to unplanned development, disregarding the best uses of this land for national parks, homes, industry, ore mining, and other uses. To open up this unspoiled wil-

derness to unplanned hodge-podge development could be among the gravest and surest consequences of the project.

An extensive land-use plan for Alaska is needed. Extraction of North Slope oil reserves should be considered in the context of the broader long range needs of Alaska, of its native citizens and of visitors to this state, so that wise judgment on the best land-use policy for this valuable wilderness will be rendered. We must ask ourselves carefully and patiently whether the unplanned destruction of this last great wilderness can be avoided in favor of a sounder alternative.

Although the Interior Department's impact statement recognized some of the environmental hazards I have listed, it concluded that the Alaskan oil is needed to decrease our dependence on foreign oil. Assuming that it is important to market the Alaskan oil in due time, it appears to me that an overland route through Canada would be a much more secure route than tankers plying the waters from Alaska to California. Furthermore, it would open a route to market for the vast oil resources in the Canadian north and thus make a far greater contribution to our secure sources of oil in the future.

If national security is to be the basis for final judgment, leaving certain of the nation's oil wells in untapped readiness would best serve our country's interests. There are often times when the cost of imported oil would offset the price of maintaining our own supplies in strategic untapped reserves. We should give this alternative close attention in planning for long-range oil consumption.

If the Administration were really serious about enlarging our supply of secure energy sources we would have been pursuing the Canadian alternative because it holds such great promise for unlocking oil resources in the Canadian north estimated to equal the vast discoveries on the American North Slope. Actually the more pressing energy need is for natural gas, not oil.

The United States need for natural gas is greater than the need for oil, both because gas is a far cleaner fuel and because gas is in short supply. The natural gas from Prudhoe Bay can be transported by pipeline down the MacKenzie Valley of Canada, and companies are planning such a project; yet there has been little public discussion of the possibility that the oil pipeline might follow the same route, permitting multiple use of rights-of-way, and minimizing construction damage. There is no adequate discussion in the Interior Department's report of the mode of transport of natural gas.

These considerations illustrate a major weakness in the approach followed by the Nixon Administration in considering a permit for the oil pipeline. It appears that the Administration has looked only at the problem of building a pipeline as designed by the oil companies. It has not addressed the question of what route could best serve the public interest.

There is no reason to make a fundamentally unsound decision just because the oil companies have already amassed \$100 million worth of pipeline at Valdez. The construction of this pipeline is too great an environmental and energy issue, with too many implications for the nation's future economic and environmental well-being, for impetuous decisions.

The argument that we must build the Alaskan pipeline at once cannot withstand intelligent scrutiny. Alberta alone has the capacity to produce 1½-2 million barrels of surplus oil per year; this is 3-4 times the amount of oil that we may expect to be extracting from Alaska by 1975.

Along with denying the permit for Alaskan pipeline the President could take no better step than removing the quotas he imposed in

the import of Canadian oil. This would give the American consumer a break and make it clear that we are seriously interested in working with Canada for the common good of the people of both nations. It would also be the beginning of the establishment of energy policies with the consumer in mind—a policy which the U.S.-Canadian oil and gas pipeline corridor could go far towards making a reality.

It is worth noting some of the economic considerations pertinent to the State of Alaska. Pipeline construction would require about 6000 people during the 3-year building period, but only about 300 for later maintenance. Many of these jobs will require skilled labor, brought from the lower 48. An economist in the Alaska Department of Labor has predicted that the pipeline will, in fact, increase the unemployment problem in Alaska by attracting large numbers of immigrants to the State for temporary jobs.

The State of Alaska receives a tax revenue from the extracted oil based on the value of the oil after transportation costs. A University of Alaska economist has suggested that overland transport of oil by a Canadian route would be cheaper, thus increasing oil revenues to the State of Alaska by as much as \$70 million. This assertion deserves much more attention than it has received to date.

To these considerations must be added the very real problem of the disruption of the traditional hunting and fishing grounds upon which many Alaskan natives depend for their daily existence. The pipeline could do irreparable damage to the economy in Alaska. Beyond this, the claims of Alaskan natives to much of the land along the pipeline right-of-way requires the detailed attention of Congress, and should not be decided under pressure of this decision.

When the economic benefits, the social costs, the environmental hazards, and the available alternatives are considered together, I am led to the inescapable conclusion that the present Trans-Alaska Pipeline route must be opposed—that we must insist that no permit be granted for its construction—that we consider alternatives which are not simply profitable, but which respect the genuine public interest—and that we must take a long look at development of the North Slope in the context of national plans for the use of energy, for the development of land and wilderness resources, for maintenance of national security, and for the promotion of harmonious cooperation with our neighbors.