

Bates College

SCARAB

Congressional Records

Edmund S. Muskie Papers

4-21-1971

Press Release - Muskie Urges Trans-Canada Route for Alaskan Oil

Edmund S. Muskie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scarab.bates.edu/mcr>

MUSKIE

Maine

(202) 225-5344

FOR RELEASE

IMMEDIATELY
Wednesday, April 21, 1971

MUSKIE URGES TRANS-CANADA ROUTE FOR ALASKAN OIL

Senator Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine) urged today the denial of a permit for the proposed Trans-Alaska pipeline and called for development of a Trans-Canada alternate route for transport of oil from the Alaska north slope.

"When the economic benefits, the social costs, the environmental hazards, and the available alternatives are considered together," Muskie said in remarks prepared for the Senate, "I am led to the inescapable conclusion that the present Trans-Alaska pipeline route must be opposed."

Instead, 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," Muskie added.

In his remarks, the Senator disclosed he had written President Nixon on April 19 urging denial of a permit to construct the proposed Trans-Alaska pipeline. "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," the Senator's letter said.

Muskie told the Senate the United States "must take a long look at the 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."

The Senator's argument against the proposed Trans-Alaska pipeline included the following nine points:

1. The potential for oil spills into coastal waters is awesome. The Port of Valdez is unusually narrow, with frequent fog and storms. The tankers now being built to carry oil from this port are 15 times larger than those involved in the recent San Francisco spill, and would require up to 30 minutes to come to a full stop after danger is sighted.

2. Because of the tremendous amount of oil to be transported by tanker, between six and 12 barrels of oil a day will be released into Prince William Sound, even after the ballast is diluted to levels specified by the Interior Department and Alaska water quality standards. These spills will contain the most toxic components of crude oil. Fish and shellfish production will be gravely affected.

3. The Port of Valdez was the site of the serious Alaskan earthquake and subsequent tidal waves in 1964. The 1,720 foot wave that struck the Alaskan south-east coast 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.

4. Earthquakes or tidal waves could cause the release of up to 20 million barrels of oil from storage tanks at the Valdez terminus or from tankers in the harbor. But Valdez is only the southern tip of a highly active seismic region which the pipeline would cross. About 20 earthquakes of a magnitude of 5 or more on the Richter scale are recorded in Alaska each year.

5. The 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 would be crossed several times by the pipeline. An oil spill into these rivers would be spread rapidly and widely through the Alaskan waters, endangering wildlife, fish resources, and spawning grounds.

6. 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 swampland, killing the lichens upon which Alaska's caribou and other game feed. Nesting sites of birds might be disturbed.

7. The construction road from the Yukon River north to Prudhoe Bay will invite the addition of a crisscross pattern of roads and land development, subjecting northern Alaska to unplanned development which would disregard the best uses of this land for national parks, homes, industry, and ore mining. To open up this unspoiled wilderness to unplanned development could be among the gravest and surest consequences of the project.

8. The United States need for natural gas is greater than the need for oil, both because gas is a 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.

9. There are also important economic considerations pertinent to the State of Alaska. An economist in the Alaska Department of Labor has predicted that the pipeline will, in fact, increase the unemployment problems of the state by attracting large numbers of immigrants to the state for temporary jobs. A University of Alaska economist has suggested that overland transport of oil by a Canadian route would be cheaper, thus increasing the oil revenues to the State of Alaska by as much as \$70 million.

Copies of the full text of Senator Muskie's statement are available through:

Dick Wilson
Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution
225-7858