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Monday, September 29, 2003

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EDITORIAL:

Drop Arctic drilling provision from the omnibus energy bill

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Republican lawmakers are still trying to squeeze language into the massive energy bill that would open up Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling.

Environmental groups are rightly upset that the provision — the same that was included in the House's version of the bill — is included in a draft of the energy bill now being hashed out in conference committee.

This is a bad idea for the environment and lawmakers have continually shown that they agree. The Senate rejected a similar provision in its version of the bill. Maine's entire delegation, including Republican Sens. Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, oppose drilling in the refuge. Other lawmakers have said they will block any energy bill that contains the provision, and they should.

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, said this week that drilling in the Arctic is about setting a precedent to drill in other pristine areas, according to the Capitol Hill newspaper Roll Call.

That makes more sense as to why this is so important to the administration than the flimsy argument that drilling would help lessen America's dependence on foreign oil. Some experts believe there's only about a six-month supply in the refuge.

The negative effects, though, would continue long after the oil was gone, harming both the habitat and the culture of the area.

Not only is drilling in the refuge a bad idea for the environment, but it's a poor political move that's likely to cause the energy bill fail. That's not to say that the rest of the energy bill is worth passing. Surely, though, destructive provisions such as this — and exploration for oil in the nation's coastal waters — don't belong in it.

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It's clear that drilling in the refuge is an energy priority of the Bush administration, but this is not where the battle can be won.

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