

Drilling for oil on U.S. soil

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In a vote of 46 to 54 on Thursday, the U.S. Senate defeated the most controversial measure of President Bush's energy plan to begin oil exploration on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), in Alaska.

If it had passed, the measure would have allowed oil drilling to commence along the costal plain of 2,000 acres of the 1.5 million acre wildlife reserve. U.S. Sen. Bob Bennett R-Utah supported drilling in ANWR as a solution to the U.S.'s energy crisis and current dependence on foreign oil from hostile nations.

"The place where the drilling would occur is the least scenic, the least unique, the least pristine of all parts of ANWR," Bennett said. "There isn't anything about the frozen tundra--other than its location--that makes it particularly sensitive. We can drill in ANWR without any significant degradation of the environment."

Environmentalists and Democrats that oppose the measure disagree that no environmental damage will be done if drilling is allowed in the region. Opponents also say that the Republican's estimations that the land contains between nine and 16 billion barrels of oil is grossly exaggerated.

In a press conference earlier this week, Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, D-South Dakota, said the measure is about money and not about solving the energy crisis. "We are just not going to allow Republicans to destroy the environment. And that's exactly

what this issue's been all about, from the very beginning," Daschle said.

Opponents of the measure are also concerned about the impact that oil drilling would have on the caribou, polar bears and other wildlife that inhabit the refuge. Erik Evans of Healy AK, opposes drilling in ANWR because it will damage the pristine land and endanger the many species of wildlife that live and raise their young there. "No one is able to predict exactly what is going to happen in the future. Drilling for oil is a delicate business, it's kind of like drinking a glass of grape juice over white carpet, if you spill a little, it's going to make a stain," Evans said.

In addition to the Energy Security Act (H.R. 2436), both parties are pursuing other measures to resolve the U.S. energy crisis identified by President Bush. Also on Thursday, in a vote of 88 to 10, the U.S. Senate approved an amendment proposed by Frank H. Murkowski, of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, to ban the importation of all Iraqi oil into the U.S.

This motion came in retaliation for last week's announcement by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein of a 30-day embargo of OPEC oil. According to Mike Glenn, Manager of the Utah Department of Energy, there is currently a nation-wide effort to address the energy crisis by developing more energy efficient technologies in government laboratories and in the private sector. Glenn said that locally in Utah renewable energy source programs that harness solar, wind and geothermal power are being tested. "If, in fact, we can derive these resources locally that would be better than continuing to rely on foreign sources," Glenn said. "The United States has done a lot in the last few years since the 70's to reduce its per-capita consumption, but we still have a long way to go."

