

Personal

4621 Q Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007

February 16, 1971

Director, Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Attention: 320

Dear Sir:

I wish to associate myself with the protest registered by virtually every conservation organization in the United States against any early authorization of the proposed Alaskan oil pipeline, hearings on which are presently in progress, and would request that my views be made part of the record.

I note that the U.S. Naval Oil Reserve was discovered years ago and has been kept in reserve as a natural resource without the apparent need for immediate exploitation which is claimed on behalf of the privately-owned oil fields. I am not fully persuaded as to the "national security" argument which is raised on behalf of the new pipeline. I note that alternate routes, such as through Canada, may not have been fully studied. Further, I am not persuaded that the values threatened by the proposed new pipeline are less important to the United States in the long run than the development of the oil reserves in Northern Alaska.

One reads about endless supplies of oil shale elsewhere in North America, including within the continental United States. Why cannot these be developed as an alternative to running unacceptable risks in the last frontier area we possess? The arguments of economic profit and economic activity have been enshrined throughout our country's history above and beyond anything else which we supposedly hold sacred. I believe that, as a civilization, we are on the threshold of a new attitude towards the land in which we will view ourselves as cooperators in the natural scheme of things rather than merely exploiters of natural resources. I think it is important that, as this new attitude is tested and adjustments in our traditional practices are made, we do not pre-empt the future by rushing forward into still another irreversible mistake.

Even if one assumes that the oil reserves of Northern Alaska must in the long run be exploited, I am not persuaded that it must be done in the manner presently proposed, or that some overwhelming necessity

requires us to do now what might be done better later. A venture such as the proposed oil pipeline, which has implications for all American people, should not be allowed to be the primary concern of private companies whose understandable motivation is profit. Precipitous action by such private groups would provide the strongest argument for public ownership of basic natural resources, something we have traditionally avoided under our free enterprise system. If a free enterprise system is to continue, it can only do so in a much broader context wherein the public good is clearly placed ahead of private economic gain, even though such economic gain may affect many thousands of people.

In essence, I think we are concerned here not with money but with the utilization of our most basic national patrimony. Thus, we must face, and cannot avoid facing, the really basic questions, such as do we need the oil, do we need it now, how can we get it while still preserving the sanctity of this national patrimony. Unless these questions can be answered soberly and with that sense of responsibility which should attend any tampering with our last great natural area, then clearly we should not go rushing ahead. History is already sitting in judgment on the way we Americans have used or misused our natural heritage. History will also sit in judgment on this generation and its lawmakers as we attempt to cope with the complex issue such as that raised by these northern oil reserves. I am by no means persuaded that we have yet approached the task with that sense of responsibility and commitment which the situation demands. I therefore request that this question of the development of Alaskan oil be deferred — as the exploitation of the Naval Oil Reserve has been deferred for many years — until every possible prospect is explored and value judgments made which represent the collective interests of the American people and not the economic interests of a minority, even such a large minority as the oil industry of the United States.

Again, I request that this statement be included in the pipeline hearing record.

Respectfully,

Ogden Williams