

US Arctic policy questioned at Iceland meet

by Tricia King
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REYKJAVIK, Iceland— Scientists from 18 nations were told Monday that the United States is shifting its Arctic focus from military to environmental security.

The group is gathered here to share recent findings regarding the status of environmental contaminants in Arctic regions. With Iceland's President Vigdis Finnbogadottir in attendance, they were read a statement from President Bill Clinton which noted that the Bering Sea is one of the earth's most biologically productive ecosystems, providing 10 percent of all the world's commercial fisheries catch and feeding many people in Asia and North America.

"To ensure that these and all other natural resources will be available for our descendants, we must carefully manage this richly endowed region," Clinton said.

The president went on to say that "careful scientific monitoring" is necessary if the sensitive Arctic environment is to be protected. But several observers at the meeting continued to express reservations about the level of U.S. commitment to environmental protection in the Arctic.

While noting that Clinton's statement is a significant acknowledgment by the U.S. that Arctic regions are experiencing serious environmental problems which must be addressed, Inuit Circumpolar Conference President Caleb Pungowiyi commented on recent reports that the U.S. Environmen-

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tal Protection Agency plans to eliminate funding for its Arctic Contaminants Research Program.

"It looks to the other countries like the United States is not committed to protecting the Arctic," Pungowiyi said. Referring to scientific findings of pollutants in the Arctic food chain, Pungowiyi called for a global solution to the problems of airborne contaminants.

"At what point does it become a major health concern? Is it when the indigenous people start having a lot of health problems? Is it when the animals are in a state of serious decline? We need to warn the world to start cutting back on some of these airborne pollutants that are being emitted," Pungowiyi said.

Following is the full text from President Clinton's statement:

Greetings to everyone gathered for the International Symposium on the Ecological Effects of Arctic Airborne Contaminants in the world's northernmost capital of Reykjavik, Iceland. I offer special thanks to the Government of Iceland for its generous sponsorship.

This meeting represents another important step toward the sound environmental management of the Arctic. Two years ago in Rovaniemi, Finland, the eight Arctic nations adopted the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy. Along with the help of indig-

enous Arctic peoples, this strategy can enable the world to achieve sustainable economic development and environmental protection in the Arctic Region. Last month in Nuuk, Greenland, the Arctic nations reaffirmed their commitment to implement the Arctic Strategy in this setting of tremendous natural resources and

wondrous beauty.

The United States is committed to protecting the Arctic environment, as we shift our efforts in this region from military to environmental security. The Bering Sea, off the coast of Alaska, is one of the Earth's most biologically productive marine ecosystems. Its fish and shell fish provide 10 per-

cent of the world's commercial catch and feed many of the people of Asia and North America. To ensure that these and all other natural resources will be available for our descendants, we must carefully manage this richly endowed region.

The difficult task of protecting the pollution-sensitive Arctic re-

lies on careful scientific monitoring and the international cooperation displayed by this conference. I send my best wishes to the participants of this significant meeting, and I sincerely hope that you will continue the considerable progress we have already achieved in securing a successful environmental future of the Arctic.