

Leaders, scientists agree on need for Arctic policy

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The Arctic area is much too valuable in too many ways — cultural, resource and defensive — for the United States to not have a sound Arctic policy and ongoing research efforts in the area, according to North Slope representatives, scientists and industry representatives.

Their comments came last week at a U.S. Senate hearing on Senate Bill 1562 which would create a coordinated Arctic research and development policy. The bill was the first major piece of legislation entered by Alaska's U.S. Sen. Frank Murkowski. The hearing was chaired by U.S. Sen. (Continued on Page Ten)

More research needed to prepare for development

(Continued from Page One)
Ted Stevens, chairman of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee.

All of those people testifying were fairly critical of the country's lack of an Arctic policy. The United States is the only one of the Arctic countries to not have an established Arctic policy despite the fact that the area is established as the main supplier of offshore oil and gas deposits and is believed to be incredibly rich in onshore oil, gas and strategic mineral deposits.

The lack of interest in the area on a long-term basis was criticized by representatives of the Inupiat community.

Oliver Leavitt, treasurer of the Arctic Slope Regional Corp., was critical of the apparent imbalance of research money spent in the Arctic compared to the amount spent in Antarctica.

Leavitt told Murkowski and Stevens that the "nation has a legal and moral obligation to the residents of the North Slope to insure that exploitation of the resources there does not jeopardize the subsistence resources on which our nutritional and subsistence depend."

Calling the proposal "long overdue," Leavitt said the bill should be approved and funded to insure that short and long term development is conducted in a way that will have minimal impact on the renewable resources of the area that the

people have been so dependent upon — fish, game, and other food sources.

Leavitt said he found ironic the amount of attention and research money that has been poured into Antarctica, "a barren wasteland with no resource value and no indigenous population.

"This attitude is no more clearly reflected than it is by the government decision to close the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory," at Barrow while continuing to pour money into Antarctic research.

"We resent this distorted sense of priorities," said Leavitt.

Leavitt reminded the senators that the Arctic serves as a host for extensive resource development would be conducted in a way that would allow the people to continue living a subsistence lifestyle in another century.

Ralph Anderson, special assistant to North Slope Borough Mayor Eugene Brower, read a statement from Brower, that also supported Murkowski's bill but suggested that not enough local input would be received if the bill is passed as written.

"We depend on the resources of a very fragile environment and it is a very respectful relationship," said Anderson.

He told the senators that in 1975, then-Mayor Eben Hopson asked for an Arctic

policy and started the wheels rolling for the Inuit Circumpolar Conference to discuss the Arctic development.

"Very little has been done on Arctic research. Millions of dollars worth of oil and gas are taken out yearly and very little research is being done."

Numerous development activities will take place in the Arctic in the coming years, said the statement.

They include the Alaska Natural Gas Transportation System to carry Prudhoe Bay gas to the Lower 48 states; Development of the 23-million-acre National Petroleum Reserve; offshore oil and gas development in the Beaufort and Chukchi sea; preliminary investigation of the oil and gas potential of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge authorized by the Alaska National Lands Conservation Act; development of the Arctic coal reserves; development of icebreaking tankers to move oil from the offshore oil rigs to the Lower 48; petrochemical development using Prudhoe Bay natural gas; and private exploration on state and Native-owned land.

That development will take place in "remote and fragile areas in which totally untested new technologies will have to be employed," said Brower who said he would like research to overtake these development plans so that oil spills and other dangers can be

"foreseen, addressed and resolved before irreparable harm is done to our land, our water, and our subsistence resources."

Brower said that the Native community must be involved because they will remain in the Arctic long after all development has stopped.

He also said that resource development which could be harmful to Native people and/or the subsistence use animals must be identified and those harmful impacts must be minimized.

He also said a program for the long-term assessments of changes accompanying resource development must be conducted.

Brower said that Native and state involvement could help to form a list of priorities for research efforts to insure that research money is well spent.

Brower said that the NARL facility at Barrow should be kept open and he said that the \$10 to \$12 million annual NARL budget could be paid for by six hours worth of oil production at Prudhoe Bay.

NARL could be used as a logistical support base and information center and resource for the Native people of the Arctic and for scientists and engineers.

Vera Alexander, director of the Institute of Marine Science, testified about one of the day's most surprising statistics

on Arctic research. Alexander said that her federally supported Institute sent four different scientific expeditions on research activities off the coast of Alaska on Russian ice-breaking research ships in the past year.

That was because the United States has only one research ship and that is equipped with sail power.

Stevens was visibly impressed by that somewhat doleful statistic and appeared unhappier when told that Russia, Greenland and Canada each have many more ice-breaking research vessels than the United States.

Alexander told Stevens that research for the waters surrounding Alaska must be done on a continuing multi-disciplinary basis so that the reasons for fisheries actions are well understood.

Dr. Juan Roederer, director of the University of Alaska's Geophysical Institute, told Stevens and Murkowski that much of the research in the Arctic has been done on a boom-bust basis that led to uneven and unrelated results.

"Because of the lack of continuity in science support, teams that have achieved scientific advances often disintegrated after completion of their missions, sometimes without complete documentation of their work."

(Continued on Page Seventeen)

Arctic research needed

(Continued from Page Ten)

Roederer said that much over-regulation of development in the area is the result of scientific uncertainty rather than of over-emphasized environmental concerns.

He said that because of the small amount of support for research, few scientists are well versed in Arctic research.

He also said that many major problems in the Arctic do not fall cleanly within one existing category and therefore don't get money to pay for research.

He also said that much basic data that has been compiled in other areas is missing in the Arctic and therefore it is impossible to determine

the amount of long-term environmental changes that result from developmental activities.

Roederer stressed the national defense importance that the area presents and he reminded the panel that "our principal potential adversary" — Russia — has won "several wars with the aid of the Arctic conditions . . . while the United States has never fought a war in the Arctic or under truly Arctic conditions."

He also asked what research has been done on the effect that Arctic conditions have on many of the advanced weapons used in today's defense efforts.

The bill, if passed, would establish a cabinet-level commission including the secretaries

of Interior, Commerce and Defense, the Alaska governor and representatives of the National oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Smithsonian Institution and National Science Foundation may attend as observers.

The bill does not include a source of funding but there is a possibility that some offshore oil development money might be designated according to a Stevens aide who said that sort of funding is approved by President Reagan.

A hearing will be held in Washington D.C. in May to obtain comments from national interests.

No vote has been scheduled.