

Stevens: Spill calls for caution

by **Jennifer Gordon**

Tundra Times reporter

Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, compared oil exploration of the outer continental shelf to the Alaska Highway, Thursday. Stevens said it took 13 months to build the highway and 30

years to fix it. A rush in oil exploration, he said, could be detrimental to Alaska's marine environment.

Stevens said the United States has the rights to more than 80 percent of the outer Pacific continental shelf, and it must be explored in an orderly way.

The Alaska Congressional Delegation sent a letter to Secretary of State Manuel Lujan after the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, asking that all action on Lease Sale 92 be ceased until the contingency plan is reviewed.

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• ANWR must wait

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Stevens said a second environmental impact statement will be required for any tract in Lease Sale 92 where oil is discovered.

Any action on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge will have to wait until the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill has been completely investigated said Stevens. Investigations could go on into next spring, he said. Stevens added that the amount of oil in the Alyeska pipeline is predicted to decline in the 1990s and exploration will have to start soon if new discoveries are to balance out the decline of oil from the North Slope.

"The Japanese have entered a new era of audacity and arrogance in dealing with us (the United States) and its time for us to demonstrate that we intend to maintain our rights," said Stevens when asked about the Drift-net Act.

Agreements with the Japanese to monitor high seas driftnet vessels were found to be inadequate by Secretary of Commerce Robert Mosbacher.

Stevens said the agreement was not acceptable because the Japanese did not agree to label their nets, limit the size of their driftnets or fix responsibility on those who cut driftnets at sea. He said it barely provided for the prevention of future salmon interceptions by allowing only nine U.S. observers on the squid fleet, which numbers more than 400 vessels. Stevens said the fleet refused to have

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transponders on their vessels that would allow the U.S. Coast Guard to locate squid boats and observe their activities.

"Japan and the North Pacific nations are the only ones we know who go out of their way to violate our claim of ownership of those fish because they spawn in our country," he said.

Steven said it is not the U.S. government that will be taking a risk by imposing sanctions on trade of fish products with the Japanese, but the North Pacific fishing industry. If sanctions are imposed, it would mean that all trade of seafood products would cease between the United States and Japan. This would mean a market loss for American fishermen who sell much of their catch to the Japanese.

Stevens said that representatives of the American fishing industry are willing to take that risk in order to save the salmon from illegal harvesting.

When asked if the United States was ready to expand into a trade war with Japan if sanctions on fish products did not work, Stevens said, "I think we are prepared to do that."