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SOLAR ENERGY IN ALASKA

On Wednesday, May 3, 1978, communities throughout the U.S. will be observing Sun Day -- a day organized and promoted by a number of solar energy action associations and consumer groups for the purpose of focusing national attention on the role of solar energy in meeting our energy needs now and in the future.

Solar energy, its close cousin wind energy, and other forms of non-renewable energy are important to Alaska and I am happy to know that a variety of Sun Day activities are planned all week long throughout our state.

Occasionally I encounter surprise in the Lower 48 states that Alaskans have any interest in solar energy, with all our oil and gas resources and our high northern latitude. But people understand Alaskans' interest when I point out that our fuel prices are as high or higher than anywhere else in the nation because of the high costs of exploration, production, and transportation. I also point out that studies have shown that solar heating and wind power are competitive with conventional energy sources in some areas, especially in rural Alaska.

It is a matter of economics. As we continue to consume our depletable fossil fuels, it is inevitable that competition for these scarce resources will increase and prices will rise. Solar energy, which previously has been at a disadvantage because of a relatively high initial cost, is becoming competitive.

We are undertaking a national effort of research, development, and demonstration of solar and other renewable energy resources in order that these sources will be available to meet our present and future needs and that obstacles to their implementation can be identified and corrected. But our program is incomplete. Congress is considering a number of measures, which I support, to accelerate the widespread application of these technologies. Measures under consideration include tax credits for residential solar energy and conservation improvements and federal loan guarantees for small businesses which manufacture solar energy devices.

The outlook for solar energy in our state is bright. I urge Alaskans to participate in Sun Day activities, to have a good time, and to think about renewable energy in our future.