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ENG 207

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Drilling in ANWR: The First Step Towards Energy Independence

For over thirty years, Americans have been bombarded with the idea of energy independence. In an interview with Brian Doherty, energy analyst Robert Bryce explains that Richard Nixon announced that he was “aiming for energy independence by the end of the decade” in his State of the Union address in 1974 and every president since him has held a similar idea (Doherty 1). In light of recent events, such as terrorist attacks and global war and crisis, the goal of reducing dependence on foreign oil has become increasingly prevalent. Since energy independence is an idea that has been around for decades, why is America sitting on billions of barrels of oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in northern Alaska? Why are we still wondering if we should open it up for oil production and exploration? Given the energy crisis America is facing, in this upcoming Senate and Congressional term, you will surely face the question of whether or not to open the refuge for oil production. This decision will be one of the most important decisions you will make while in office. So, your answer should be based on facts and what your constituents want.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge plays an important part in our country’s energy future. In his book, Gusher of Lies: The Dangerous Delusions of Energy Independence, Robert Bryce explains, “given it’s huge potential and the desire to reduce oil imports, the refuge should

Comment [E1]: This is a great choice of quote to follow your claim with – nice job!

Comment [E2]: Might want to put ANWR in parentheses here, since that is how you refer to it later in the paper

Comment [E3]: Who is “you” here? Voters? Congresspeople?

Comment [E4]: Ahh...much better – but still, it might be a little better to clarify that the first “you” is addressing “you as a congressional representative” or whatever. Overall, though, I’m so pleased to see that you’ve identified and are attempted to engage a specific audience – great job!

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be opened immediately to oil and gas exploration and production” (279). There are numerous reasons why the refuge should be opened for drilling oil. And, there are arguments opposing the idea. However, the benefits of opening the area for drilling much outweigh the costs. Opening ANWR for drilling **is** necessary not only because it **was** planned to be used for oil exploration initially and it **will** create jobs, lower gas prices and increase federal revenues by billions of dollars, but it is also the best step towards successful energy **interdependence** for the United States.

Comment [E5]: Notice how we have some verb tense shifts in this sentence – this can be very confusing for readers

Comment [E6]: Interdependence? Or independence? These are different things.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, better known as ANWR, is currently 19.5 million acres of land in the northeast corner of Alaska that has been protected by Congress for nearly half a century. According to the article “What is ANWR and Where is it?” published on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge website, ANWR was originally formed, made up of 8.9 million acres of land, on December 6, 1960 for the purpose of protecting the environment and wildlife in the area (“What is ANWR and Where is it?”). **“In 1980 and 1983 ANWR was added to for a current size of 19.6 million acres comprising of three distinct legal areas of use within its borders”** (“What is ANWR and Where is it?”). Since these additions, ANWR is actually not entirely a “Refuge.” Only the southern part of ANWR, which consists of 9.16 million acres, is actually classified as “Refuge.” The central 8 million acres is considered “Wilderness.” The third area, known as the Coastal Plain is the area in question.

Comment [E7]: Good – this distinction could have been introduced earlier in the paper

Comment [E8]: Watch out for “disembodied” quotes – this quote is just sitting there, plopped into the paragraph, without being integrated into your own sentence or provided with any framing or context.

Comment [E9]: Nice background info here – I had no idea that there were three areas and that only one area was the one being contested in the energy independence debate.

Many people assume that ANWR, in its entirety, is protected from all oil drilling and exploration in the Congressional bill. These people assume that politicians are trying to overstep the Congressional bill in order to drill for oil in the refuge. According to anwr.org, “to

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say or suggest then that “the Refuge” (meaning ANWR’s entire area) would be opened for oil and gas exploration is completely false. The Congressional definitions of “refuge” and “wilderness”, which comprises over 92% of the ANWR area, forbids any development of any kind.” (“What is ANWR and Where is it?”). However, part of ANWR was initially set up for the purpose of oil exploration.

Knowing that there was evidence of oil beneath ANWR when the bill was first written, Congress set aside about 1.5 million acres for oil development. This area was defined in section 10-02 of “the Congressional bill, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), that expanded ANWR in 1980” (“What is ANWR and Where is it?”). In 1981, Congress designated the Coastal Plain “as requiring special study to determine its oil and gas potential and the effects of development on the environment” (“Making the Case for ANWR”). So, where do politicians come into question? Kolson L. Schlosser explains that the bill includes the requirement that “no leasing, or any type of development leading to oil production, is allowed anywhere in the refuge, including the North Slope, unless permitted by an act of Congress” (Schlosser 6-7). Since 1987, when the Department of Interior recommended developing ANWR, this is where our efforts have been held up (“Making the Case for ANWR”).

There is no question as to whether there is oil in ANWR. In fact, Schlosser states, in his article, “U.S. National Security Discourse and the Political Construction of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge” that the area of ANWR defined in section 10-02 of the ANILCA “holds what is, by most accounts, the United States’ most promising source of domestic oil” (6). However, until drilling begins, we will not be able to say exactly how many billions of barrels of oil could

Comment [E10]: Super interesting – I didn't know that, either!

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be produced. Representative Michele Bachmann, of Minnesota explains that “the Energy Information Administration estimates that 10.4 billion barrels of oil are recoverable in ANWR” (Bachmann 3). The USA Today printed the article, “Alaska Drilling Is No Quick Fix, but it Needs to Happen” which states, “estimates are that the area could eventually produce about a million barrels of oil a day for 30 years. That’s nearly 5% of the 21 million barrels a day Americans consume,” (USA Today). If the Coastal Plain of ANWR were opened for drilling, as was its original purpose, Americans would see an increase in jobs, lower gas prices, increased national revenues, and a greater chance for energy interdependence.

Comment [E11]: Nice reiteration of your thesis – it’s appropriate to do that here, after giving us pretty extensive background information.

Opening ANWR will create thousands of jobs for Americans. In a time when unemployment rates are extremely high compared to recent decades, it is important to look out for your constituents and their economic futures. Some estimates of new jobs to be created have been as high as 250,000 to 735,000 (“Making the Case for ANWR”). However, these estimates are based upon assumptions like the new natural gas pipeline would be approved for building at the same time that ANWR is opened for drilling, which may or may not happen. The most realistic, and unassuming, estimate comes from the bipartisan Joint Economic Committee which found “that drilling ANWR would “create 65,000 jobs nationwide by 2020” (Bingaman). It is also important to note that jobs drilling in ANWR could not be outsourced to any other area of the world, which is a major problem affecting the job security of Americans. Our country should be utilizing these job opportunities to improve the economic future of American citizens.

Comment [E12]: Good – nice job connecting your reasoning to the current economic climate – appeals to your audience’s sense of urgency and timeliness.

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Another way that opening ANWR for drilling will better the economic situation for individual Americans is that it will lower gas prices. We are facing record high prices that affecting every aspect of our day to day lives. "Pro-drilling policies would likely bring lower

prices, as did recent announcements that Brazil had found new offshore oil fields and Iraq would sign contracts to increase oil production" ("Drill here. Drill now. Drill ANWR.")

Representative Michele Bachmann agrees that if ANWR were opened, "we would immediately begin to tap into our own resources, helping make us less dependent on foreign energy sources and reducing the cost to consumers" (6). It is a basic economic fact that as the supply for a good increases, its cost decreases. So, as we increased the total supply of oil in the market, the market price for oil would inevitably decrease.

In addition to saving individuals money at the pump, opening ANWR would also increase federal revenues which would help our nation dwindle down the largest budget deficit in American history. The ANWR website explains that his increase in federal revenues would come from "bonus bids, lease rentals, royalties, and taxes." ("Making the Case for ANWR").

According to The National Defense Counsel, "over the first fifteen years of production, economic activity associated with ANWR oil production would generate almost \$29.2 billion in new Federal revenues" ("Fast Facts: ANWR"). Decreasing our government deficit should be a primary concern in Washington and opening ANWR would bring in revenues that could help do that.

While creating jobs, lowering gas prices and decreasing the national debt all prove that opening ANWR will help revive our economy, the most important reason that ANWR should be

Comment [E13]: Well...gas prices are actually going DOWN now, right? So that makes this reason a little less compelling. However, you might be able to salvage this by pointing out that the reason gas prices are currently going down is because of problems with the global economy – and energy independence will help our gas prices to not be so heavily driven by the global market. Right? (at least that's how the logic is working out in my own mind, but you know far more on this topic than I do)

Comment [E14]: Another disembodied quote. =(

Comment [E15]: Niiiceeee. This should be a very appealing and convincing reason for your audience.

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opened for oil drilling and exploration is that it would help **up** move away from importing foreign oil. To move away from foreign oil, we must replace our foreign imports with domestic oil while reducing our dependency on oil in general. However, the domestic oil we have available now is not sustainable in the long run.

At this point in time, we are running out of oil in our domestic fields that we are currently drilling and looking towards more domestic drilling opportunities. ANWR's website states that:

domestic crude oil production, which has already declined from nearly 9 million barrels per day in 1985 to about 6.6 million barrels per day in early 1995, is projected to decline to less than 5 million barrels per day in 2010. Even with only a modest growth in U.S. crude oil demand, the deficit in U.S. supplies will be on the order of 10 million barrels per day, which will have to be made up by new discoveries or imports. ANWR's contribution will therefore be critical to national energy needs" ("Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: the issue"

ANWR is the first step to opening up more domestic drilling. According to Robert Bryce, "The U.S. Department of Interior estimates that the ANWR could produce about 1.4 million barrels of oil per day, which would make that field's output larger than that of Texas, America's foremost oil producing state" (279). This means that ANWR is able to produce 25% of current U.S. production, which is "almost as much as the United States imports from Venezuela" ("Alaska

Comment [E16]: Why the paragraph break here? Aren't you still talking about the same main idea that you introduced in the previous paragraph?

Comment [E17]: This block quote is indented too far on both sides – only need to indent five spaces on the left side

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Drilling”). Therefore, according to the ANWR website, “the U.S. would save \$14 billion per year in oil imports” if ANWR were opened (“Making the Case for ANWR”). While this production capacity and the savings to the government are critical facts, there is still opposition against opening ANWR for drilling from environmentalists.

Comment [E18]: That’s pretty impressive!

Many national environmental groups, such as the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society, have argued that ANWR should not be opened for drilling because of the negative effect drilling could potentially have on the wildlife that the refuge is protecting. These environmental groups have actually been quite successful in convincing the American public of the negative effects of opening ANWR for drilling mainly because of the general lack of knowledge the public has. In fact, many of the assumptions these environmentalist groups are making are not backed up by facts.

Comment [E19]: So what are their primary arguments? Can you cite some language actually produced by these organizations?

Many of these groups assume that the entire 19.5 million acres of ANWR will suddenly be overrun with oil rigs. First, it is important to note that “primary oil development will occur on only a tiny portion (perhaps as little as 2,000 acres) of the refuge’s 19.5 million acres” (Bryce 280). Bachmann adds, “that is not even 1/10 of 1% of the total area of ANWR” (2). Bryce extends his argument by saying, “furthermore, it’s worth remembering that the ANWR itself represents less than one-tenth of all the federal land in Alaska” (Bryce 280). As is evident, the amount of area in question is actually very small compared to the total size of ANWR and the amount of land in Alaska that is federally protected.

Furthermore, these groups do not understand that it is possible to be environmentally friendly while drilling for oil. With respect to the wildlife populations protected in the refuge,

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history has shown that wildlife and oil drilling already are able to successfully coexist in Alaska's northern-most part with the North Slope at Prudhoe Bay and the gas pipeline. Particularly, with increases in technology, "studies at Prudhoe Bay to the west, where oil has been produced since 1977 in an area more than twice the size of the one planned for ANWR, show that the effects can be minimized and wildlife protected," ("Alaska Drilling"). Furthermore, given the technological advances that have occurred in the past three decades, "If Prudhoe Bay were built today, the footprint would be 1,526 acres, 64% smaller." ("Making the Case for ANWR") Therefore, the effect that opening ANWR for drilling would have on the environment is much smaller than these particular interest groups are assuming. Also, Representative Mike Conaway favors drilling in ANWR and wrote, as quoted in "A Bright Green Light for ANWR Oil":

"Exploration will be done in an environmentally sensitive manner. For example, the drilling will take place only in winter so that it will not disturb the caribou migration. Special ice roads will be used that melt after use so there's no impact on the tundra. And three-dimensional seismic and horizontal drilling technology will be used to achieve the smallest drilling footprint possible" ("Bright Green Light").

Obviously, the idea that the big business will swoop into the area with no regard to the wildlife or wilderness of ANWR and just take over with drilling, is widely inaccurate.

Comment [E20]: VERY compelling support for your refutation, Heather! Great job!

Comment [E21]: Again, watch the indentation of block quotes

Comment [E22]: And what steps will the government take to keep businesses accountable for their environmental practices, etc?

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In and of itself, ANWR will not make America independent from foreign oil.

“Drilling in ANWR...is an important piece of any long-term strategy to make the nation less vulnerable to oil-producing nations and supply distributions” (“Alaska

Drilling”).) However, it is a step on the path toward energy independence. History has proven that wildlife and oil exploration and drilling can coexist in the arctic. Furthermore, technological advances will ensure that drilling in ANWR leaves the smallest ecological footprint possible. These environmental concerns are not as valid as they are believed to be. By increasing the supply of domestic oil, opening ANWR for drilling will create jobs, lower gas prices, increase federal revenues and help us work towards a positive energy future.

Comment [E23]: Another disembodied quote. =(

Bravo, [student name]!! I know you struggled SO much with keeping this topic reigned in, and you did so BEAUTIFULLY! What you have here is a very focused, well-organized, effectively presented argument that is tailored to the specific needs of a clearly defined audience – well done! There are a couple of spots that could have been further developed with more discussion and evidence/examples, and there are some problems with quotation conventions here and there, but overall, this is excellent work. You should be very proud – I sure am! Thanks for your hard work. --Erin

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