

Poll Finds Strong Majority Opposes Drilling in Arctic Wildlife Refuge

Bipartisan survey also reveals overwhelming opposition to backdoor budget maneuvers

February 9, 2005 (Washington, DC) - A bipartisan national survey has found that by a margin of 53 percent to 35 percent, Americans oppose proposals to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The bipartisan telephone poll of 1,003 registered voters was conducted January 13-17, 2005, by Republican firm Bellwether Research and Democratic pollsters Lake, Snell, Perry and Associates for the Alaska Coalition, an alliance of national and local groups who favor protection for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Question: Should oil drilling be allowed in America's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge?

53%	Do Not Allow Oil Drilling
38%	Allow Oil Drilling

The poll found a remarkable gap in intensity of feeling about drilling: 44% of respondents strongly oppose drilling, while just 25% strongly support it. Only about 10% were undecided on this issue.

"Voters believe there are some places that should simply be off-limits to oil drilling and the Arctic Refuge is one of them," said Celinda Lake of Lake, Snell, Perry and Associates, the Democratic polling firm that co-authored the bipartisan survey. "They believe we have a moral responsibility to protect this unique area, and the abundant birds and wildlife that live there, for future generations."

"One of the most striking findings from this poll is the degree to which voter opinion on the issue of drilling in the Arctic Refuge has solidified, moving from the realm of public policy issue to value," said Christine Matthews, of Bellwether Research & Consulting, the Republican polling firm that co-authored the bipartisan survey. "Only about 10 percent of Americans are undecided on this issue – most people know where they stand when it comes to drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge."

In a finding that is particularly relevant in the current debate over the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, an overwhelming majority – 73 percent v. 18 percent – agreed with a statement that the issue of drilling in the Arctic Refuge is "too important to the American public and future generations to be snuck through" in the budget process, and disagreed with drilling proponents' argument in favor of allowing drilling as part of the budget. Senate Energy Committee Chairman Sen. Pete Domenici (R, NM) has announced his desire to attach a drilling proposal to the Senate budget resolution to circumvent the Senate's normal process for contentious legislation.

Question: In the next few months, Congress is likely to vote on allowing oil drilling within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge .

Some Members of Congress say that drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge should be included as part of the budget bill because it is the best way to get it approved by Congress and that the royalties generated from drilling rights would be important for our federal budget, our economy, and our future. **(18 percent agree)**

Other Members of Congress say that the issue of oil drilling in the Arctic Refuge is too important to the American public and future generations to be snuck through in the budget bill in an attempt to circumvent the established process. It should be discussed and brought to a vote on its own merits. **(73 percent agree)**

Even among those who support drilling in the Refuge, a majority opposes inserting the issue in the budget bill. Opposition to this plan is strong and consistent across age, gender, party and other demographic groups. Even among Republicans and those who voted for President Bush in 2004, a majority opposes using the budget process to open the Arctic refuge to oil drilling.

Reflecting the Arctic issue's shift from policy debate to settled value in voters' minds, opposition to drilling remains intense (58% to 33%), even when both sides of the debate are presented to voters.

Question: Which view comes closer to your own? [Statements A and B were rotated]

33% (A) Some/Other people say we should allow oil drilling in a small part of the Arctic Refuge because the oil there could replace 30 years of imports from Saudi Arabia. With ongoing instability in Iraq and the Middle East, we need to reduce our dependence on oil from that region and maximize our domestic oil resources for our country's energy needs and national security. The Arctic Refuge represents America's best chance for a major discovery.

58% (B) Other/Some people say oil drilling in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge will do little or nothing to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil. The U.S. Geological Survey says there is less oil there than the U.S. would use in 6 months and oil companies admit that none of the oil would reach the market for at least ten years. Energy experts agree that making cars more fuel-efficient is the single most effective thing the U.S. can do right now to decrease dependence on foreign oil and increase national security.

Given the choice, voters -- by a margin of more than three to one -- choose an energy policy based on greater efficiency and wasting less, and investments in clean renewable sources of energy over more drilling in the US.

Question: Which of the following do you think is the best way to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil?

18% Drill for more oil and gas in the U.S., including areas within wildlife refuges and other protected areas to increase our domestic energy supply.

34% Conserve more, waste less, and develop more fuel-efficient cars so we use less oil and gas.

39% Rely less on oil and gas and expand development of alternative forms of energy like wind, solar, and ethanol.

9% No opinion

"When you pose the question in a simple, unbiased way, voters consistently say they want to see the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge the way it is: wild, unspoiled and free of oil drilling," said Jim Waltman, director of wildlife and refuges for The Wilderness Society. "Instead of doing permanent, irreparable harm to the caribou, polar bears and migratory birds that depend on the Refuge, Americans are yearning for a different energy future. We hope Congress will listen to what their constituents are telling them, and once again reject proposals to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge."