

Oil's Victory in Alaska, with a Dem Assist

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

For the past quarter century, there's been an annual ritual on Capital Hill. Each spring, with the regularity of migrating warblers, the oil lobby bursts into the halls of congress with a scheme to open for drilling the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, perched on the northern rim of Alaska on the ice-bound Beaufort Sea. This seasonal onslaught prompts the big eco groups to frenzied action, unleashing a blizzard of emergency fundraising appeals adorned with shots of caribou and polar bears, pleading with their members to send money immediately in order to "save the refuge". Year after year, the face off has ended in a stalemate, with the politicians pocketing cash from both sides.

Now this dance is over. With a 51-49 pro-drilling vote on a deviously-crafted line item in the U.S. Senate's budget bill, the oil industry has seized its most prized trophy: access to reservoirs of crude beneath the 1.5 million-acre wildlife refuge on the Arctic plain.

ANWR used to be an icon of the power of the environmental movement. Now it stands as a symbol of its impotence. With ANWR, the most sacrosanct stretch of land in North America, now pruned open to the drillers, everywhere else, from the Rocky Mountain Front to the coasts of Florida, Oregon and California, is fair game.

It didn't come easy and in the end it took a feat of procedural prestidigitation and the participation of a few well-placed Democrats to seal ANWR's fate.

Over the last decade, as the Republicans' grip on Congress has tightened, the fate of ANWR has depended on the judicious invocation of the filibuster by anti-drilling forces in the senate. Even as the drilling block gained a majority, they were never able to muster the 60 votes needed for cloture, and the measure was repeatedly abandoned in the doldrums of limitless senate debate.

In the past, ANWR measures have originated in the appropriations and en-

ergy committees. But this time, the drilling scheme was secreted inside the rules for the 2006 congressional budget resolution, which protected the proposal from blockage by a filibuster.

This bit of legislative trickery was devised by Senator Ted Stevens. On the eve of the senate vote, Stevens told his hometown paper, the *Anchorage Daily News*, that he had been suffering from "clinical depression" for the past three years over his inability to nail ANWR.

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"I'm really depressed, as a matter of fact, I'm seriously — I'm seriously depressed," Stevens told the *News*. "Unfortunately, clinically depressed. I've been told that, because I've just been at this too long, 24 years arguing to get Congress to keep its word. I'm really getting to the point where I'm taking on people even in my own party that do things that I don't think is fair. You get to that point where you're challenging your colleagues — that's not exactly good. I really am very, very disturbed."

You can see why Stevens got a little sweaty. As the crucial vote neared, he witnessed the defection of seven Republican senators: John McCain, Gordon Smith, Olympia Snowe, Susan Collins, Lincoln Chafee, Mike DeWine and Norm Coleman.

The architect of Alaskan statehood and chief facilitator of the transfer of the state's public resources to corporations

bristled at critiques from some in his own party that he had used sleazy tactics to secure victory. "The only reason we're doing it [in the budget] is they filibustered for 24 years," Stevens, dressed for battle in his "Incredible Hulk" tie, shouted on the floor of the senate, pounding his fist on the podium. "Twenty-four years!"

If there's any good news to come out of this, it's that Stevens, one of the most flagrantly corrupt members of congress, vows he'll retire once ANWR is opened. Of course, with at least a decade's worth of lawsuits in the works, he'll be mouldering in his grave long before a gallon of ANWR crude ever sluices down the pipeline to Valdez.

The razor-thin victory in the senate hinged on the votes of three key Democrats: the Hawai'ians Daniel Inouye and Daniel Akaka and Mary Landrieu from the Cajun oil patch.

The Alaska and Hawaii delegations cruise through the congress like synchronized swimmers, voting harmoniously when it comes to matters involving the wishes of either state. They entered the union together, and they will leave it in ruins together. Inouye calls Stevens his "brother". Akaka, who fashions himself as the senate's most vocal defender of native rights, said piously he was "saddened" that his vote trampled the concerns of the G'wichin tribe, who live near the refuge and are subsistence hunters of the Porcupine caribou herd, which is threatened by drilling.

When it comes to oil policy, Louisiana can be counted on to make it a threesome. So it was no surprise to see Democrat Mary Landrieu offer her vote to the oil cartel. She was simply following the path blazed years before by her Democratic Party predecessors Bennett Johnston and John Breaux.

Much of the blame for the loss of ANWR must fall at the feet of Bill Clinton, Bruce Babbitt, and the clique of environmentalists who winked at the Clinton administration's incursions into the Arctic for eight years. When Clinton opened to drilling the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, only 90 miles to the west of ANWR and a landscape of almost identical ecological features, Babbitt vowed that the oil could be extracted without leaving anything more than a toeprint on the tundra. Bush and Stevens used almost identical language

to describe their plans for ANWR. So the Clintonoids set the precedent for “environmentally-benign” oil drilling in fragile ecosystems; they opened the gates to drilling ANWR.

In pushing for ANWR drilling, Bush emphasized the role Alaska oil would play in boosting domestic supplies. But no one is really sure if there’s much oil under the tundra at all, and even the rosiest scenarios proffered by the oil lobby suggest a big strike would only sate the nation’s oil thirst for something in the order of six months.

Another villain in this saga has been the Teamsters Union, under the leadership of James Hoffa Jr. Hoffa has worked hand-in-hand with the union-busting Ted Stevens on ANWR drilling measures over the past five years. Hoffa hailed Stevens’ arm-twisting tactics and praised the vote as a victory for the union. “For the Teamsters, the primary motive for our support of this effort has been constant and singular — job creation,” Hoffa gloated. “The Teamsters will continue to fight to open ANWR until we have succeeded. We look forward to putting this prolonged national debate behind us and getting to work at developing the resources of ANWR.”

Hoffa likes to spout off about his political power, but he should know better than to boast that ANWR drilling will generate many U.S. jobs. There’s not the slightest assurance that ANWR crude will ever end up inside an American refinery, car or power plant. That’s because in 1994 Bill Clinton, in concert with Alaska delegation, overturned a 30-year old ban on the export of Alaskan crude. That ANWR oil is just as likely to end up in South Korea or China as the refineries of Long Beach. Indeed, ARCO, one of the big players in the Arctic, owns a new refinery in Shanghai, which is one of the world’s largest.

The losing bid to keep the drillers out of ANWR was led by two Democrats who have yet to relinquish designs on the White House: John Kerry and Joe Lieberman. This humiliating defeat should send them both packing through the exit along with Ted Stevens. But they will cling on, deploying the same worn tactics that led to the corporate routs on the bankruptcy and class action lawsuit bills.

At this rate, only the Republicans will be able to save Social Security... or anything else. CP

CounterPunch Notebook

BY ALEXANDER COCKBURN

George Kennan departed this life at the age of 101, amid respectful eulogies in the press. In his advanced years, his prime rostrum was the *New York Review*, where he advocated policies of genteel internationalism and détente markedly different from his ferocious cold war postures of earlier years, so crucial in setting the terms of the Cold War in the years following World War II.

In fact, Kennan’s self-rehab was one of the wonders of the late twentieth century. Not conspicuous in his memoirs were such important aspects of his service to the state as his salvaging of Nazi war criminals for use by the U.S. in its postwar engagements, or such documents as his wartime memo apropos de-Nazification. Chris Simpson quoted it in his book *Blowback*: “Whether we like it or not, nine-tenths of what is strong, able and respected in Germany has been poured into those very categories which we have in mind” for purging from the German government — namely, those who have been “more than nominal members of the Nazi Party.” Rather than remove “the present ruling class of Germany”, as he put it, it would be better to “hold it [that class] strictly to its class and teach it the lessons we wish it to learn.”

NADER ON TERRI SCHIAVO

We congratulated Ralph Nader for his excellent performances on Crossfire, where he spiritedly identified himself as being Ralph Nader, “from the *progressive left*”, after tying Robert Novak in knots. Nader was eager — who isn’t? — to talk about the Schiavo case.

“When the relevant state law appoints the spouse as guardian *ad litem* [for the duration] there should be no conflicts of interest involved.” Of course Michael Schiavo does have such a conflict of interest, in that he stands to inherit a \$350,000 portion of the successful medical malpractice suits launched in Terri Schiavo’s name. “Her parents want to take care of Terri. There is no state interest in letting her die. As far as the ‘persistent vegetative state’ is concerned, Terri is not on life support, heart pump or ventilator. If her biological family wants to take care of her, why should Michael retain the power to pull the feeding tube from his spouse? He’s gone through hell for 15 years,

and for the last ten years he has been living with another woman who has brought him two children. So it seems to me that the equity of the situation is to have Michael withdraw as guardian and let Terri’s parents be guardians and take care of her. That’s the crux. When a spouse is in effect married to two women (after five years the second woman is his common law wife), he should withdraw and let her parents take of their child.

“It all comes down to that core point. As far as I’m concerned, there’s no legitimate state interest. Why is it assumed that her spouse has the right to pull the plug?”

“Disability rights groups don’t want Terri’s feeding tube withheld, in part because there are enough examples of medical science advancing. In the 1980s these tube removals were frequently done with children with Down syndrome. Where it comes to a ‘permanent vegetative state’, doctors can be wrong; they all follow the leader.”

Nader faults the Republicans. “They should have pushed for legislation to allow removal from state to federal courts, as with criminal law *habeas corpus* suits. Instead they wrote this specific bill and somehow left out the kind of certainty they wanted. They should have let her parents have the right to have standing to file in federal court and above all to have a *de novo* review of the case. By leaving that out they insured what the federal district court judge did on March 22, which was to decline to hear the case.

“Here you have Republicans pouring out speeches on the Hill expressing deep compassion for human life and yet these same speechmakers are mostly savage opponents of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Highway Safety Administration, the Food and Drug Administration, and of regulations designed to reduce the hundreds of thousands of Americans who are killed, injured or sickened through medical malpractice, occupational disease and traumas, air pollution and raw poverty. I can caustically comment that just perhaps some of these cold-hearted Reps, having gone through their Terri Schiavo epiphany, will expand their newly discovered compassion for adult human life by forcefully expanding the meager enforcement authority and budgets of these federal life-saving agencies.” CP