

LES AUCOIN
1ST DISTRICT, OREGON



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

Dear Colleague:

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, HR 39, will be debated on the floor of the House on Wednesday. Because of the Oregon primary election May 23, I will not be able to participate in the floor debate, but I want to strongly urge your support for this legislation which represents the most important conservation bill of the decade.

The bill has undergone extensive consideration in both the Interior and Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committees. Hearings held in Alaska and across the "Lower 48" last summer showed overwhelming public support for the measure.

During markup, boundaries were carefully drawn to exclude those areas of high mineral and energy values. In fact, the U.S. Geological Survey conservatively estimates that 70 per cent of the lands with significant potential for hard rock mineral exploitation lay outside HR 39's boundaries, and fully 95 per cent of the lands with favorable or high potential for oil and gas are outside the boundaries.

Geologists familiar with statistical analysis conclude that only 4 to 5 per cent of America's mineral resources would be included. Furthermore, the significance of this percentage is lessened because mining costs are 1.5 to 2.75 times the mining costs in other states. A recent book published by the Brookings Institution concludes that it is doubtful whether owners of a large number of mines ever will be able to overcome the cost problems of operating in Alaska. It is no accident that Alaska has had no significant mining industry in 40 years.

Regardless of whether extractable resource values do exist in HR 39 lands, the ecological, scenic and wildlife values are so tremendous that they should be the very last lands exploited. I do support a continuing assessment of the oil and gas potential of wildlife refuge lands not designated as wilderness, so that if future needs dictate, national decisions can be made as to the best use of those lands.

After much deliberation, the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, of which I am a member, supported wilderness designation of the entire Artic Wildlife Range because of the critical nature of the habitat there for the international Porcupine caribou herd.

With my strong support, it also established the Copper River Delta Wildlife Refuge -- the sole nesting place for the world's population of dusky Canada geese, which winter in Oregon's Willamette Valley. The Copper River Delta also is the nesting place for half the world's population of trumpeter swan. These provisions are of paramount importance and deserve your support.

Joint management by the federal government and the State of Alaska of all federal lands is inappropriate and would set a dangerous precedent. The state already has been authorized to select 104 million acres from the unreserved public domain in Alaska. This is the most generous land grant to a state in U.S. history and is more than adequate to meet the state's future needs. Any such amendment should be rejected.

The issue before us is one of overwhelming significance. The outcome will determine how much we, as a nation, have matured and learned from past mistakes. Another opportunity to preserve entire ecosystems, vast expanses of wild lands and the wildlife that roam them never again will present itself. We have a responsibility to ourselves, to future generations, and to the land and wildlife to pass a strong HR 39.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Les Aucoin".

LES AUCOIN

Member of Congress