

RECENTLY A FRIEND OF MINE forwarded to me an email outlining why it's a good idea to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). It had been forwarded to him by someone who'd had it forwarded to him, and was originally sent by someone whose daughter and son-in-law make their home in Anchorage. The son-in-law is a foreman in an oil field in the ANWR. According to the mother-in-law, her son-in-law must fly his own plane to get to his job where "he spends months at a time in the most God forsaken place this side of Siberia." She never says whether she (or he) has ever been to Siberia.

For the uninitiated, and I must confess I was one of those until I read this email, the ANWR is located in northeastern Alaska, on the Prudhoe Bay. The writer of the email claimed that the ANWR is equivalent in size to a postage stamp in the Mojave Desert. I'm not sure why the reference to a postage stamp was made unless it was an effort set my mind at ease—that's it okay to drill in a wildlife refuge because of its relative size. I imagine the settlers took that same view of the buffalo in the 1800s: "It's okay to slaughter them—one herd covers three whole states." Today they're a protected species. Accompanying this prelude was a series of photographs depicting magnificent mountain ranges, lush valleys overgrown with wildflowers, clear rivers—quite a contrast to the steel and concrete of Manhattan which, I surmise, is *not* forsaken by God.

"But we're not going to drill here," the email claimed. "These are the places liberals like Al Gore want you to believe we'll be drilling. But it's not true! This is where we'll drill ..." and a series of photos followed showing flatland: a field of ice with blowing snow, and the same field in summer—flat and green. Ah, this must be what the author defined previously as God forsaken. But you know what? There is beauty in this, too, the stark plainness a contrast to the mountains and rivers and valleys. I would seek for God in a place like this, which certainly isn't going to look any more beautiful with a big red and white drilling rig on it. By the way, while we're at it let's go ahead and legalize prostitution, too—but don't put that red light district in my neighborhood, put it in the ghetto.

The email went on to explain that there is enough oil in the ANWR to supply the U.S., at its present rate of consumption, for more than two hundred years. Wow! Isn't that a long time? Until you consider the age of the planet, approximately 4.7 billion years, and when *Homo sapiens* first appeared—maybe 120,000 years ago. Two hundred years equates to eight, maybe ten generations. So what do we do then? Where do we go to drill after that?

Next came the pitch: the Alaskan wildlife *loves* the pipeline because it's heated and provides shelter to them during the winter months. My goodness, how in the world did the wildlife manage to survive for thousands of years prior to man blessing it with a heated pipeline? The next slide showed a herd of caribou grazing, during the summer months, in front of a big oil rig (doing little to beautify this God-forsaken but caribou-embraced landscape), and another photo of a grizzly bear walking on top of

the pipeline, with the caption: "Hey, this bear seems to *really* hate the pipeline near Prudhoe Bay!" See? Man really can co-exist peacefully with the lower life forms!

Best yet, folks: a new pipeline won't even be required because the drilling location in the ANWR is *only* 160 miles from the North Slope Prudhoe Bay pipeline, to which it would be connected.

Finally, the scare tactic was employed: "Environmentalists have forced gas prices up to an im-possible rate, forcing us to buy oil from our enemies. It's a conspiracy ... you'll soon be paying \$5 per gallon if we don't drill for oil in the ANWR, blah, blah, blah."

Well, we've paid \$5 a gallon before and we are never again going to see .49 cents a gallon, let alone \$1.89 a gallon or even \$2.89 a gallon—no matter where we drill for oil.

No matter how much oil we find in Alaska, in the Gulf, in the Great Lakes, or anywhere else, Americans will pay what they're paying now, and more in the future to account for inflation, while the oil companies continue to rake in record profits.

Face it: this isn't about what's good for the consumer—it's all about profits.

Look, it's called a refuge for good reason, and the ANWR should *remain* a refuge. There are far too few places on the planet that don't bear the bootied footprint of man. Must he trounce the ANWR, too?

I know it's only landscape, but why can't man see beyond his own immediate needs? Will he ever stop treating the environment as simply a resource, to be raped and pillaged for profit?

Will man *ever* care about a world he won't live to see?



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