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The Case Against Drilling in ANWR

With: Rep. Jay Inslee

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This is a rush transcript from "On the Record," August 18, 2010. This copy may not be in its final form and may be updated.

GRETA VAN SUSTEREN, FOX NEWS HOST: During our "Oil in America" series, you've heard the arguments in favor of drilling in ANWR. Well, now the other side.

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opposes drilling. Good evening, sir.

REP. JAY INSLEE, D-WASH.: Good evening. It is a good evening. It's beautiful.

VAN SUSTEREN: Sir -- it is beautiful. All right. Now, it seems to me there are different considerations. For instance, let's -- Prudhoe

Bay, which is west of ANWR, has offshore and onshore drilling. That's one area to discuss. The other is ANWR to the east, where there is a ban on any drilling at all. You support the ban.

INSLEE: Right.

VAN SUSTEREN: You've been there. Why?

INSLEE: Well, I guess I'd offer three reasons that I think it's unwise for us to move in this direction right now.

Number one, the fact is -- and this is just a geologic and economic fact -- is that drilling in this area really is not going to make an appreciable difference for our economy. And the reason is, is that this represents less than half of 1 percent of the world's oil reserves. And according to the energy studies that have been done, even if they prove out, which remains a question, might have -- might have an impact of maybe 3 cents a gallon of our cost of gasoline in the year 2028. So it's quite a minimal amount when you look at the word oil supply.

In fact, the problem is, you know, we've only got 3 percent of the world's oil supply, but we use 25 percent of the world's oil. So it's really not a solution to our problem. That's number one.

Number two -- and I think this is an important fact. And I appreciate your looking at this issue, but the fact of the matter is, if we're going to grow our economy, if we are going to seize the jobs of the next century, we have to get busy focusing our national debate and national investment on the new clean energy technologies or China is going to eat our lunch.

China right now is preparing to roll out electric cars, lithium ion batteries, solar cells, cellulosic ethanol. This is where the future of energy is. We've a finite resource in oil, just like we had a finite resource in whale oil, and we made a transition. And we have to really focus our national energies in a bipartisan way, I would hope, on finding out a way to compete with China to really build new energy sources of the future.

And third -- and this is an important one, and maybe it's obvious but I think it's worth saying. We've made some national commitments to our grandkids. We've done it in Yellowstone National Park. We've done it in Glacier. We've done it in Mt. Rainier National Park. And we've done it in the Arctic refuge.

You know, a Republican, Teddy Roosevelt, started this whole shebang at the Pelican (ph) Refuge, and we've never violated that commitment. This is a special place. We've made a commitment that this is -- this is during the Eisenhower administration, by the way. We made a decision that we were going to make a commitment to our grandchildren that we were going to preserve this relatively small space the way the creator designed it. And I just think that's a commitment that we should keep. It's the right thing for America both economically and as a part of a commitment to our grandkids.

VAN SUSTEREN: It seems to me that the -- let's start with the first one, the economic argument. It seems to me...

INSLEE: Right.

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sit down and talk about that and try to figure out -- and at least do -- you know, figure out, you know, if there -- if there is enough oil there. There's -- I've heard estimates...

INSLEE: Right.

VAN SUSTEREN: ... between 5 billion barrels to 16 billion barrels. I simply have no idea. But if it has no appreciable economic impact, then I would assume that those who want to drill would have less interest in drilling because they're in the money-making business, right?

INSLEE: Well, no. No, I think -- you know, there will be -- look, if people find oil, there will be profits. And the people -- there will be and could be some economic benefit for individual companies. But to the nation at large -- and this is a national asset. The Arctic National Refuge belongs to all of us in Seattle, in Chicago, in Florida. This is a national treasure that we all -- we all own. And for the nation, it simply will not make a difference over the long term or short term in the real energy usage of this country.

But what we'd be losing for really the first time in this country of abandoning this commitment to our grandkids of preserving this area -- and importantly -- and here's something I think is important. One of the problems with the debate about drilling and offshore drilling is we've taken our eye off the ball. We've got to get in this economic competition to build lithium ion batteries and electric cars and cellulosic biofuels so that we can start building these products here and selling them to China.

Now, we've made a start on that. The first lithium ion battery plant, which will replace gasoline, is under construction this fall in Holland, Michigan, with laid-off American auto workers. That is a vision for this country that is both our destiny and the best hope we have to grow two to three million jobs in the next several years in this country. So I think that's what we need to talk about.

VAN SUSTEREN: Congressman, we only have about a minute left in this, and I hate to give such short shrift to such an important topic, but let me...

INSLEE: It is a big topic.

VAN SUSTEREN: ... talk for a second about the -- it's huge, and it's very important. The wildlife up there -- when we were -- I mean, the magnificent Brooks mountain range, absolutely beautiful. And then you have this coastal area. And it -- frankly, it's not particularly -- I mean, it has some -- it has beauty -- is -- that's the area where they want to do the drilling. And they say that it's a small footprint, that it's a very small amount of land and won't have any impact on the wildlife. Is that true or false?

INSLEE: I don't think it's true, and I'll tell you why. I've been there. It's one of the most -- it is the most spectacular place. I've been, you know, Glacier, Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, you name it. This is the most wildly profuse biological place for about a month-and-a-half. It's a feeding and mating frenzy because animals -- the grizzly, the caribou, the redpoll, you name it, they have to do all their living in about 45 days. It's an incredible biological display. And there is -- I met several biologists that are concerned about the caribou migration in that regard. So I do think it's appropriate that our national decision, made during the Eisenhower administration, should be preserved for future generations. That's the right decision. We should stick to it. It's quite a unique spot.

VAN SUSTEREN: And we've only sort of just touched the surface, all very important topics, and we certainly haven't dug into them as deep as we should. But Congressman, thank you sir.

INSLEE: There'll be another day. Thanks for your interest.

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