

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 6

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT

Introduced: 1/28/13

Referred:

A RESOLUTION

1 **Relating to legacy wells and legacy well sites; urging the United States Department of**
2 **the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, to open new areas of the National Petroleum**
3 **Reserve - Alaska for environmentally responsible oil and gas development; and**
4 **requesting the Office of the Governor to increase nationwide awareness about legacy**
5 **wells and well sites.**

6 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

7 **WHEREAS** the United States Navy and the United States Geological Survey drilled
8 approximately 137 wells on federal land in northern Alaska between 1944 and 1981, all of
9 which are now abandoned; and

10 **WHEREAS** the United States Bureau of Land Management is the current operator of
11 the abandoned wells, now referred to as legacy wells; and

12 **WHEREAS** only 17 of the legacy wells have been properly plugged and reclaimed;
13 and

14 **WHEREAS** 10 of the legacy wells were determined by the Alaska Oil and Gas
15 Conservation Commission to be of no concern because they were drilled to less than 50 feet

1 in depth, were drilled solely for soil stability data, did not encounter hydrocarbons, were never
2 cased, and have healed and revegetated; and

3 **WHEREAS** the remaining legacy wells are out of compliance with the regulations
4 adopted by the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission; and

5 **WHEREAS** at least 10 of the legacy wells out of compliance with the regulations
6 adopted by the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission currently leak hydrocarbons,
7 have leaked hydrocarbons in the past, or have a high potential to leak hydrocarbons in the
8 future; and

9 **WHEREAS** three of the legacy wells can no longer be found; and

10 **WHEREAS** the changing geography of the Arctic puts additional legacy wells at risk
11 of being lost before remediation can occur; and

12 **WHEREAS** the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission has repeatedly
13 reminded the federal government of the obligation to plug legacy wells properly and to
14 reclaim legacy well sites; and

15 **WHEREAS** the legacy wells that have not been properly plugged and reclaimed pose
16 a significant risk to surface vegetation, groundwater, fish, land mammals, and sea mammals;
17 and

18 **WHEREAS** wood and metal debris and deteriorating buildings at the sites of the
19 legacy wells litter the landscape and detract from the natural beauty of the Arctic region; and

20 **WHEREAS** the federal government has received \$9,480,946,486 from lease sales in
21 the National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska and the outer continental shelf of the state and
22 should use a portion of those funds to plug and reclaim legacy wells in the state; and

23 **WHEREAS** the state cannot impose fines on the federal government for violating the
24 regulations of the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, but if it could do so, the
25 fines would exceed \$8,000,000,000; if the statute of limitations were disregarded, the fines
26 would exceed \$40,000,000,000; and

27 **WHEREAS** both state and federal regulations require the plugging and reclamation of
28 legacy wells, and the federal government would not allow a private entity to remain in
29 violation of those regulations; and

30 **WHEREAS** the National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska was created in 1923 specifically
31 for oil and gas leasing, exploration, and production; and

1 **WHEREAS** the United States Congress mandated a program of oil and gas leasing
2 within the National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska in 1980, opening the petroleum reserve to
3 future development; and

4 **WHEREAS** future oil and gas production from the National Petroleum Reserve -
5 Alaska could boost throughput in the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System and create new jobs and
6 revenue for the state and the federal government;

7 **BE IT RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States
8 Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, to plug legacy wells properly and to
9 reclaim the legacy well sites as soon as possible in order to protect the environment in the
10 Arctic region; and be it

11 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States
12 Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, to work collaboratively with the
13 Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission and other entities in the state to plug legacy
14 wells and reclaim legacy well sites; and be it

15 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States
16 Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, to comply with state regulations and
17 to use best practices when plugging legacy wells and reclaiming legacy well sites; and be it

18 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States
19 Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, to consider turning over the
20 responsibility for plugging legacy wells and reclaiming legacy well sites to an entity that
21 could perform the work in compliance with federal and state regulations with greater cost-
22 effectiveness; and be it

23 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States
24 Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, to take more action to plug legacy
25 wells and reclaim legacy well sites safely so that the Arctic environment suffers no further
26 harm; and be it

27 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature respectfully requests the
28 Office of the Governor to disseminate information through appropriate national news outlets
29 and by other available means to increase awareness nationwide of the dangerous conditions of
30 the legacy wells and legacy well sites in the state and the federal government's failure to plug
31 the legacy wells properly and reclaim the legacy well sites; and be it

1 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States
2 Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, to open new areas of the National
3 Petroleum Reserve Alaska for environmentally responsible oil and gas development that will
4 increase throughput in the Trans Alaska Pipeline System and ensure the state plays an even
5 larger role in making our country energy independent.

6 **COPIES** of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Barack Obama, President of
7 the United States; the Honorable Ken Salazar, United States Secretary of the Interior; the
8 Honorable Mike Pool, Acting Director, Bureau of Land Management, United States
9 Department of the Interior; and the Honorable Lisa Murkowski and the Honorable Mark
10 Begich, U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative, members of the
11 Alaska delegation in Congress.