

# STATE OF ALASKA THE LEGISLATURE

## 2013

**Source**  
SCS HJR 6(RES)

**Legislative  
Resolve No.**  
9



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

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

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

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

**WHEREAS** the United States Bureau of Land Management inappropriately calls the abandoned drill sites "legacy wells," a term that does not adequately connote the disastrous

legacy of negligence and the environmental damage inflicted by the wells on the Arctic landscape, and the term "travesty wells" better describes the nature of the abandoned wells; and

**WHEREAS** only 17 of the travesty wells have been properly plugged and reclaimed; and

**WHEREAS** 10 of the travesty wells were determined by the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission to be of no concern because they were drilled to less than 50 feet in depth, were drilled solely for soil stability data, did not encounter hydrocarbons, were never cased, and have healed and revegetated; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**WHEREAS** the state cannot impose fines on the federal government for violating the regulations of the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, but if it could do so, the

finances would exceed \$8,000,000,000; if the statute of limitations were disregarded, the fines would exceed \$40,000,000,000; and

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

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

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

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

**BE IT RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature wishes to replace the term "legacy wells" with the term "travesty wells" so that all people will understand the long history of negligence and hypocrisy on the part of the federal government, especially the United States Bureau of Land Management, for failing to live up to its mission statement by properly plugging and remediating the well sites; and be it

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

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

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

**FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, to consider turning over the

responsibility for plugging travesty wells and reclaiming travesty well sites to an entity, preferably an entity that hires residents with Arctic expertise, that could expertly perform the work in compliance with federal and state regulations with greater cost-effectiveness; and be it

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

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

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

**COPIES** of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Barack Obama, President of the United States; the Honorable Sally Jewell, United States Secretary of the Interior; Neil Kornze, Principal Deputy Director, Bureau of Land Management, United States Department of the Interior; and the Honorable Lisa Murkowski and the Honorable Mark Begich, U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative, members of the Alaska delegation in Congress.