

SENATE CS FOR HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 6(RES)

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY THE SENATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

**Offered:
Referred:**

Sponsor(s): REPRESENTATIVES MILLETT, Kawasaki, Isaacson, Peggy Wilson, Nageak, Johnson, Tuck, Hawker, Feige, Hughes, Gara, Costello, Reinbold, Holmes, Chenault, Austerman, Lynn, Olson, Josephson, Gattis, Tammie Wilson, Thompson, Muñoz, Saddler, Pruitt, Foster

SENATORS Micciche, Dyson, McGuire, Gardner, Bishop, Egan, Giessel, Fairclough, Stedman, Meyer, Dunleavy, Wielechowski

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 by the United States Bureau of Land Management as
12 legacy wells; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

19 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States
20 Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, to plug travesty wells properly and
21 to reclaim the travesty well sites as soon as possible in order to protect the environment in the
22 Arctic region; 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 work collaboratively with the
25 Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission and other entities in the state to plug travesty
26 wells and reclaim travesty well sites; and be it

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

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

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

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

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

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

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