

Memo

To: Unified Arctic Campaign
From: Nancy Belden, John Russonello and Emma White
Re: Findings from June omnibus

Date: July 2, 2008

When offered a choice between protection and drilling, a majority of Americans chooses to protect the National Arctic Wildlife Refuge. This is despite gas prices upwards of \$4 a gallon, and our survey suggests that at least part of the reason gas prices have not led to a desire to drill is that there is little public belief that drilling will lower gas prices for consumers. These are among the key findings of a nationally representative telephone survey of 817 adults conducted by Belden Russonello & Stewart on an omnibus questionnaire for the Unified Arctic Campaign between June 26 and June 30, 2008. The margin of sampling error for this survey is ± 3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Key Findings

1. A majority of Americans want to protect the Refuge

When informed that “currently, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska is a protected wildlife habitat where oil and gas drilling are off limits,” a majority of Americans (55%) agrees that Congress should “continue to protect this wildlife refuge,” while only 36% agree that Congress should “open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling.” Those who feel strongly in favor of protection (43%) greatly outnumber those who feel strongly in favor of drilling (27%). Fewer than one in ten (8%) is unsure.

Attitudes on this question are sharply divided along party lines, with Democrats and independents taking similar positions and Republicans taking the opposite view. Two-thirds of Democrats (66%) and six in ten independents (59%) prefer protection to drilling. A large majority of Republicans (64%) favors opening the area up to drilling.

Note: When the Pew Research Center asked, “would you favor or oppose allowing oil and gas drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska?” 50% favor drilling and 43% oppose¹. Prior research has found little public familiarity with the Arctic Refuge or the debate over drilling in the area. Thus, the Pew question reflects Americans’ initial reaction to drilling in an unfamiliar place. The BRS question offers a piece of information that many voters do not have, which is that the area is currently off-limits to drilling, and so it reflects public attitudes toward a policy change to allow drilling in an unfamiliar place that is already protected.

2. Drilling in the Arctic Refuge is not seen as a solution to gas prices

Few Americans believe that gas prices will come down if drilling in the Arctic Refuge is allowed. A little more than a third (35%) say they think that “allowing oil companies to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge will result in lower gas prices for American consumers,” while 53% say they think it will not result in lower prices. Twelve percent are unsure.

Again, Democrats and independents agree, with Republicans on the other side. Six in ten Democrats (60%) and independents (61%) say that drilling will not lower prices, while six in ten Republicans (60%) say it will.

3. Strong response to arguments against drilling

Americans agree with several arguments against drilling in the Arctic Refuge. Information about land already available to the oil companies leads two-thirds to agree that more wilderness should not be opened to drilling. Three quarters agree that new energy technology is a better solution than oil for addressing energy cost and supply. And a smaller majority agrees with an argument about protecting a valuable wilderness area from harm.

- 68% agree and 24% disagree that “*the oil companies already have obtained the right to drill for oil and gas in 32 million acres of oil-rich federal land that they are not using. As long as they have not drilled in the acres already available to them, there is no reason to open up more Alaskan wilderness to drilling.*” Seven in ten Democrats (72%) and independents (73%) agree, along with a majority of Republicans (57%).
- 74% agree and 17% disagree that “*investing in new energy technology, renewable fuels, and more efficient automobiles is a better way to address energy prices and our long-term needs than is relying on more drilling for a limited*

¹ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, June 18-29 N=2,004 adults

amount of oil.” On this question attitudes are less sharply partisan: 81% of Democrats, 73% of independents, and 71% of Republicans all agree.

- 56% agree and 38% disagree that *“we should not allow drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge because this is one of the most valuable wilderness areas left in the U.S. and it would be permanently damaged by drilling.”* On this question, Democrats hold strong views in favor of protection (70% agree), along with a smaller majority of independents (55% agree). A majority of Republicans (57%) disagrees.

Arctic: Open to Drilling or Protect as Wildlife Refuge

Q1. Currently, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska is a protected wildlife habitat where oil and gas drilling are off limits. In your opinion, ROTATE: (should Congress open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling, OR should Congress continue to protect this wildlife refuge?) Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	Protect (net)	Drill (net)	Protect strongly	Protect somewhat	Drill somewhat	Drill strongly	DK/REF
Total	55%	36	43%	12	9	27	9
Registered voters	53%	38	41%	12	10	28	9
Men	45%	48	36%	9	11	37	7
Women	64%	25	50%	14	8	17	11
Democrats	66%	25	56%	10	7	18	9
Republicans	27%	64	17%	10	14	50	10
Independents	59%	36	46%	13	10	26	5
<\$25k HH income	61%	23	49%	12	4	19	16
\$25-50K	60%	33	43%	17	10	23	7
\$50-75K	46%	48	33%	13	11	37	6
\$75K+	50%	46	41%	9	10	36	4

Impact on Gas Prices of Opening Refuge

Q2. Do you think that allowing oil companies to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge will result in lower gas prices for American consumers or not?

	Yes/It Will lower prices	No/It won't lower prices	DK/REF
Total	35%	53	12
Registered voters	34%	54	12
Men	42%	51	6
Women	28%	54	17
Democrats	22%	60	18
Republicans	60%	32	8
Independents	34%	61	5
<\$25k HH income	28%	48	24
\$25-50K	29%	63	8
\$50-75K	45%	51	3
\$75K+	38%	53	9

Oil Companies Should Use Existing Leases First

Q3. The oil companies already have obtained the right to drill for oil and gas in 32 million acres of oil-rich federal land that they are not using. As long as they have not drilled in the acres already available to them, there is no reason to open up more Alaskan wilderness to drilling.

	Agree	Disagree	DK/REF
Total	68%	24	8
Registered voters	68%	25	7
Men	62%	31	7
Women	74%	18	8
Democrats	72%	21	7
Republicans	57%	35	8
Independents	73%	24	4
<\$25K HH income	80%	13	7
\$25-50K	82%	16	2
\$50-75K	64%	29	8
\$75K+	54%	35	11

Should Not Destroy Valuable Wilderness

Q4. We should not allow drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge because this is one of the most valuable wilderness areas left in the U.S. and it would be permanently damaged by drilling.

	Agree	Disagree	DK/REF
Total	56%	38	6
Registered voters	54%	40	6
Men	44%	52	4
Women	68%	24	8
Democrats	70%	24	6
Republicans	38%	57	6
Independents	55%	42	3
<\$25k HH income	73%	25	2
\$25-50K	66%	29	5
\$50-75K	45%	48	7
\$75K+	45%	51	4

New Energy Technology is Better than Drilling

Q5. Investing in new energy technology, renewable fuels, and more efficient automobiles is a better way to address energy prices and our long-term needs than is relying on more drilling for a limited amount of oil

	Agree	Disagree	DK/REF
Total	74%	17	9
Registered voters	75%	16	9
Men	74%	16	10
Women	74%	18	8
Democrats	81%	15	4
Republicans	71%	22	7
Independents	73%	14	12
<\$25k HH income	73%	16	11
\$25-50K	83%	13	4
\$50-75K	73%	15	12
\$75K+	73%	22	5
