



SciMUNC XVII

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME (UNEP)

The Willow Project

BACKGROUND GUIDE

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME

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Letter from the Dais

Dear Delegates,

Greetings delegates and welcome to SciMUNC 2023! My name is Jack Murdock, and I am very excited to have the opportunity to chair your UNEP committee! I am a junior at Bronx Science, and have been a part of Model UN ever since my freshman year. I hope to be able to pay my experiences in Model UN forward, while also learning from you all. Outside of Model UN, I'm a writer for *The Science Survey*, Bronx Science's newspaper, and a member of the law journal club. I also work at the New York Legislative Service and I'm on the Bronx Science ultimate frisbee team! I'm looking forward to engaging with you all and eager to hear the creative solutions you have to the pressing environmental issues that the Willow Project presents. As we work together over the course of this conference, please be assured that I'm here to assist and support you all in any way that I can. Feel free to email me at murdockj@bxscience.edu with any concerns, ideas, or questions. Let's harness our collective passion for change, together, and make a positive impact in our world. I can't wait to see what we accomplish together.

Welcome to the UN Environmental Programme! My name is Lisa Dascalu and I will be your co-chair for this conference. I'm currently a junior at Bronx Science and this will be my second year participating in Model UN. This team has allowed me to grow in terms of creativity, public speaking and cooperation. I have learned so much history in Model UN, use it in conversation in my everyday life, and even in history class. While I see myself pursuing a career in STEM in the future, I appreciate the importance of historical events and like to inform myself on current conflicts that affect humans everywhere. Apart from Model UN, I am a member of the Track and Field team and the Psych and Neuro club at Bronx Science. I also intern at a chemistry lab at a university. I am eager to see the way you all cooperate and form ideas on the controversial Willow Project. Be creative, diplomatic, and don't be scared to voice your ideas! I am excited to meet you all, and if there are any questions, please feel free to email me at dascalul@bxscience.edu.

Best,
Jack Murdock and Lisa Dascalu

Committee Description

UNEP

The United Nations Environmental Programme is responsible for enabling nations and people to improve quality of life whilst not harming generations to come. The Environmental Programme strives to encourage collaborations for caring about the environment and solidifies environmental standards and making sure that environmental legislation is followed.

The Environmental Programme is divided into six areas of concentration to help organize and maximize efficiency. These areas include Climate Change UNEP, which provides the means for countries to integrate climate change responses, Post-Conflict and Disaster Management UNEP which help seek solutions on how to assist the environment in a crisis stricken country, ecosystem management, which focuses on managing and restoring ecosystems in a sustainable way. Other subcommittees include Environmental Governance UNEP, which assists governments to establish laws or policies to achieve sustainable development in that country, Harmful Substance UNEP, which attempts to lessen

the amount of hazardous and harmful materials, and lastly the Resource Efficiency/Sustainable Consumption and Production UNEP, which strives to ensure that natural resources are handled in a sustainably friendly manner. All of these subsections work to make sure that the global environment is going in the right direction.

Background Information

America's oil industry began in 1859, when the first oil well was drilled in Pennsylvania. Ever since then, this would quickly spiral into the United States being a dominating oil powerhouse in both production and consumption. The newfound discovery of this raw material in America has led to a timeline that has changed life as we know it. Crude oil (petroleum) was refined, and at the time was used in the production of candles, perfumes, and lampposts—which would allow people at the time to be more active due to the presence of light during nighttime.

In 1893, Charles Duryea and J. Frank created the first American gasoline automobile. This revolutionary innovation helped society shift away from the usage of horses and carriages to these oil-ran machines that would help them travel longer distances at a much more effective rate. As an automobile became a staple necessity in every household life, the cost of one became more affordable for the everyday person. The rise in demand for these vehicles also came with a steep demand for gasoline and oil to make these automobiles function. The newfound gap in the market, with such a

high demand for oil, caused companies to go on the search for oil reserves and make a profit off of them. Companies like Conoco, which have been operating since 1875, found a new submarket in the oil industry and began to greatly profit. The demand continued to grow and find other purposes as through the 1930s, Conoco stepped foot in the market of aviation, electric generation, home heating, industrial applications, etc. Eventually in 2002, the companies Conoco and Phillips Petroleum merged for the reason of being able to handle the fluctuation of oil prices better as a merged company. The unification between these two oil companies resulted in them becoming the sixth largest traded oil company in the world at the time.

As the world continued to transform, ConocoPhillips would follow its footsteps by expanding outside the oil industry and is now venturing in the plastic industry. The company would continue to make strides by collaborating with General Electric and opening a global water sustainability center in Qatar to focus on recycling byproduct water from oil and gas projects.

ConocoPhillips would continue to grow their company by purchasing land all around the United States. A very crucial piece of land that the company has exploratory leases to is the National Petroleum Reserves Alaska (NPR-A). In 1976, the “National Petroleum Reserves Act” was put into law which prohibited the Secretary of the Interior from leasing land in the NPR-A. However, ConocoPhillips had already drilled in this area and explored massive amounts of oil. ConocoPhillips did not let this opportunity pass up of this multi-billion yielding which led to the draft of the idea, more formally known as the Willow Project.

The Willow Project was initially shown signs of approval by the Trump Administration when the idea was first proposed. As a part of Trump’s policy, an increase in domestically produced energy was sought for, which can be attributed to the initial approval shown. The master development plan for the Willow Project (MDP) was approved by the Trump Administration in October 2020, authorizing ConocoPhillips to start the construction of the associated infrastructure needed for oil production the NPR-A. Even from the first

signs of approval, environmental and indigenous groups pushed for legal action against the Trump Administration. The legal challenges presented brought attention to the adequacy of the environmental assessment and permitting processes.

Additionally, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 22, 2023, only a month later, the U.S. pledged 60 million barrels of oil from their reserves directly to Ukraine to keep them afloat. The tensions and conditions that were laid forth also resulted in a spike of U.S. oil being exported to members of the European Union.

After years of disagreements between governments, locals, and activist groups, which allows the Willow Project to proceed. Joe Biden’s campaign promise was situated against the drilling of oil in the United States. This led to many Americans feeling confused as to why the Biden Administration passed a project that was contrary to what Biden exclaimed. However, it seems that this administration did not have much of a choice. ConocoPhillips was in possession of the land in the NPR-A before Biden took office.

Main Committee Topic

ConocoPhillips has the legal rights to drill oil in their land holdings within Alaska. The act of canceling these leases, would amount to a long and pricy court case. In the case where they lose, millions of dollars would be wasted with nothing in return. This was the predicament for the Biden administration to compromise with this company. However, now environmental activists groups, and everyday people are in dispute over this project.

Environmental Concerns

The main concern coming from this project would be the effect that it has on the environment. The Willow Project would be the largest oil project in the United States. The act of drilling oil on a normal scale has disastrous effects on the climate, biodiversity, and ecosystems of surrounding areas that can affect the entire globe. Simply based on approximations, the Willow Project would put 280 million metric tons of carbon pollution in the atmosphere over the next 30 years. Furthermore, it was estimated that the devastating effects of the Willow Project would result in the loss of: 532 acres of wetlands, 619 acres of habitat disturbances for polar bears, and more than 17,000 acres of such disturbances for birds. This is an astronomical amount of influence over the local environment, with one of the major outcomes being hastening the rates of global warming.

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) formally made the statement, being associated with the Willow Project, that the worlds' governments are not staying on track with ensuring that the earth's

temperatures will not rise above 1.5 degrees Celsius. The temperature change the world is trying to prevent would result in near-irreversible changes including rising sea levels and extreme heat waves which have been impacting Earth up to this day.

Alterations in temperature/living conditions have evidently killed plants, animals, and humans all over the world.

In Alaska, there are numerous unique and sensitive ecosystems that are more prone to these temperature changes. There are many animals that are endangered in the NPR-A such as the beluga whale, and the Willow Project would not only displace these endangered animals, but the results of climate change will eventually drive them to extinction.

Economic Incentives

A crucial aspect of the Willow Project would be the economic benefit that it would provide. To put it simply: the more oil that is drilled, the more money is brought about. The Willow Project will produce an anticipated 600 million barrels of oil in the next 30 years. This newfound supply of oil, which is all being drilled in America, diverts America's reliance on oil from the Middle

East. There have been many disputes and conflicts involving the United States' need for oil. These range from military conflict in the Middle East, like the Gulf War or Iraq War, territorial fights in the South China Sea, and generally depending on unstable governments/regions to supply their oil needs. The continuation of producing its own oil could limit future conflicts the United States has with foreign powers over oil.

Another point to consider is how the Willow Project would create. An estimated 2,500 construction jobs and 300 permanent jobs would be produced. This would cut back on unemployment and would be better for families that were struggling to find work before within the local region. A boost in local employment would also result in a flow of income supporting the local government. The boosted local economy would help fund services like healthcare and education, as Alaska is on the lower end of these aspects compared to the other 49 states. All these benefits would add onto having a reliable source of domestic energy that the U.S. has used for many decades.

Indigenous Perspectives

There are many Indigenous groups that live in Alaska, and for thousands of years have been able to thrive with their traditional way of life involving hunting, fishing, and gathering food. These Indigenous people have been allowed to live peacefully, but with the introduction of the Willow Project, their lives will be heavily affected. The NPR-A is an area managed by the Bureau of Land Management for its ecological and cultural importance. There are traditional Iñupiat villages that live in the land surrounding the NPR-A, who all consider this area as their home. The NPR-A is home to thousands of birds, caribou, and Arctic animals. By supporting these animals, it supplies a food source for the Indigenous Iñupiat people that live in the area. The Willow Project will most certainly displace thousands of animals, and with their altered ecosystem, many animals will die. Hundreds of years of traditional hunting and fishing could be affected by this project, subsequently erasing knowledge and traditions. However, it cannot be ignored that ConocoPhillips has the legal right to drill oil in this territory.

Upon hearing about the Willow Project, thousands of Alaska Native activists have traveled to the White House to protest against this project. Nuiqsut activists, the Indigenous group living closest to the area where the Willow project will take place, claim that oil and gas extraction have a direct negative effect on the many animals living in the area that are all essential to their community. Natives are concerned about the health of community members and the security of food that the Willow Project will cause. On the contrary, other groups such as the Alaska Federation of Native are in support of this project, believing that they will still be able to live their traditional lifestyle whilst strengthening the economy for their region.

Past Actions

The Biden Administration was unwavering in its decision on approving the Willow Project, despite the flaws observed indigenous groups, environmental advocates, and citizens across the United States. Shortly after the approval, Earthjustice, a nonprofit organization that devotes itself to litigating environmental issues, filed a lawsuit against ConocoPhillips to stop it from proceeding. The case provided by Earthjustice revolved

around the promise of the new clean economy the Biden Administration would advance, being breached. Outside of litigation, efforts have been made to educate individuals of the dire environmental and climate impacts the Willow Project poses with the usage of public awareness campaigns being launched by organizations as well as online protesting being done through the means of social media.

However, throughout the midst of public pressure, ConocoPhillips remains insistent in its stance that the project fits within the boundaries of the Biden Administration and creates a newfound economic hub in Alaska. The company advocates for themselves stating that they have successfully consulted with local Alaskans, state and local governments, stakeholders, and federal agencies in order to address any concern held with the proceedings of the project during its development stage. The company is stated to actively sponsor environmental analyses done on the effects of the Willow Project; which include the marine, agricultural, and archaeological influences present.

Questions to Consider

1. How does the Willow Project affect the person you are representing?
 2. How will the Willow Project affect trade and the global economy?
 3. How will the Willow Project affect trade within the United States?
 4. What measures can be taken to prevent destructive forms of climate change and harm to ecosystems?
 5. Do the advantages of proceeding with the project outweigh the consequences it may bring?
 6. Should laws be changed to revoke drilling rights in the NPR-A?
 7. Should economical problems or environmental problems be prioritized in this specific situation?
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Bloc Positions

Environmental Conservation Bloc:

1. Mary Petolta (U.S. Representative)
2. Thad Hill (Chief Executive Officer of Calpine)
3. Carter Roberts (President of the WWF)
4. Kristen Miller (Executive Director of the AWL)
5. Bob Shavelson (Executive Director of Cook Inletkeeper)
6. Tom Goldtooth (Environmental activist)

Energy Security Bloc

1. Joe Biden (President of the United States)
2. Ryan Lance (CEO of ConocoPhillips)
3. Willie L. Phillips (Chairman of the FERC)
4. Fatih Birol (Executive Director of the IEA)
5. Rex Tillerson (Former CEO of Exxon and secretary of state)

Indigenous Rights and Cultural Preservation Bloc

1. Brian Ridley (Chair of the Tanana Chiefs Conference)
2. Paul O'Brien (Executive Director of Amnesty International USA)
3. Heather Kendell-Miller (Attorney & advocate for indigenous rights within Alaska)
4. Willie Hensley (Former Alaska State Representative)
5. Annie Blake (Chair of the Yukon Legislative Assembly)

Economic Development Bloc

1. Mike Dunleavy (Governor of Alaska)
 2. Chris Hladick (Former Regional Administrator for the U.S).
 3. John Boyle (Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources)
 4. Lori Townsend (Journalist and host of Alaska Public Media's "Alaska News Nightly")
 5. Al Gross (Former independent candidate for the U.S. Senate)
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Climate Change and Sustainability***Bloc***

1. Tasneem Essop (Executive Director of the Climate Action Network)
2. Mike Sfraga (Chair of the USARC)
3. Bryan Newland (U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs)
4. Micheal Regan (Admin of the U.S. EPA)
5. Sheri Burreta (Chairman of the Chugach Alaska Corporation)
6. Alice Rogoff (Publisher)

7. Ulf Kristersson (Prime Minister of Sweden)

International Cooperation Bloc

1. Henriette Geiger (EU UNEP Ambassador and Permanent Representative)
 2. Andrés Manuel López Obrador (President of Mexico)
 3. Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud (Minister of Energy of Saudi Arabia)
 4. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister of Canada)
 5. Ursula von der Leyen (President of the European Commission)
 6. Achim Steiner (Administrator of the UNDP)
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