

She and I worked together on a bill last year that set in motion a plan for Corpus Christi and Nueces County to get the water our community needs. Corpus Christi is in a better position today to secure water for our population and economy as a result of her service, and I am proud to have worked with her as mayor.

I ask my colleagues to join me in commending Mayor Mary Rhodes for her service and in wishing her well in her future endeavors.

THE MORRIS K. UDALL ACT OF
1997

HON. BRUCE F. VENTO

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 5, 1997

Mr. VENTO. Mr. Speaker, it was with bitter-sweet pride that last week I once again introduced the Morris K. Udall Wilderness Act of 1997. I introduced this legislation in the last Congress and it was pushed aside—along with countless other environmental initiatives that were sensible, rational legislation—a victim of not just partisan bickering. That would be bad enough—but pushed aside because of powerful oil interests hell-bent on cashing in today while abandoning sound stewardship in their exploration and exploitation of fragile American natural treasures. This legislation is very much needed to provide permanent wilderness designation and protection for a magnificent and special place, the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The Arctic Refuge coastal plain is a unique ecosystem, long recognized for its rich biological diversity. Today over 200 species of wildlife depend on the coastal plain for survival. Muskoxen, wolves, polar and grizzly bears, and countless complex fauna and flora create a web of life unlike any other place on Earth. The coastal plain is perhaps best known as the home of the 160,000 member Porcupine Caribou herd, which migrates there for calving and post-calving each year. In reality, this Arctic desert landscape is a 20th century window to the ice age, referred to as the North American Serengeti.

I have worked on issues affecting Alaska for a long time. One of my first assignments in Congress was to serve on the Alaska Lands Subcommittee with then Chairman Mo Udall and John Seiberling. Over a 4-year period, Congress debated the appropriate disposition, designation and use of Federal lands in Alaska. We frankly lost some debates and designations and won the preservation of magnificent areas constituting our North American natural legacy.

The final version of H.R. 39, signed into law by President Carter, is one of the most significant pieces of environmental law ever enacted. While this legislation protected many of Alaska's unique resources, the final disposition of the Arctic Refuge was left with limited safeguards, but not permanently resolved. While the House of Representatives strongly supported wilderness designation, the final compromise has left open the possibility of further exploration and development in this fragile area.

For the past 16 years the coastal plain, or 1002 lands, has been in a twilight zone enjoying the status of wilderness without the full force and protection of the law. The failure to

designate the coastal plain as wilderness has haunted us and placed this unique ecosystem at risk. In the last Congress, some of my colleagues supported opening the refuge to oil exploration as a means of raising revenue to balance the budget. We must put this destructive policy path behind us. We must protect this jewel of our national refuge system.

This wilderness designation is under attack from a host of special interests. Instead of considering the potentially catastrophic environmental consequences of oil drilling in the coastal plain, they are looking to pad their already bulging wallets with short-term profits. In short, they are seeking instant gratification at the sacrifice of our children's natural legacy.

Mr. Speaker, the choices in this debate are quite clear. We can save, or we can destroy. We can protect, or we can plunder. We can choose to listen to the majority of the American people who oppose the devastation of this special place, or we can choose to irresponsibly give heed to the fortunate few. I choose to save; I choose to protect; and I choose to listen to the American people, who want to provide true wilderness protection for the Arctic Refuge.

Protecting the environment through policy and law is a topic and craft that Mo Udall knows a lot about, and serving with him was a distinct pleasure and honor. Chairman Udall was dedicated to preserving our Nation's crown jewels for future generations. He worked seriously, but always had a knack for making his points with wit and poignancy. In talking about the Alaska Land Legislation, Mo spoke eloquently to all Americans: "Not in our generation, nor ever again, will we have a land and wildlife opportunity approaching the scope and importance of this one. In terms of wilderness preservation, Alaska is the last frontier. This time, given one great final chance, let us strive to do what is right."

We couldn't do better than to honor Chairman Udall with this designation that he fought so hard to put in place. The American reservoir of values, vision and inspiration that Mo Udall evoked will be enlisted today as Congress once again acts to determine the fate of the Arctic Refuge.

I urge my colleagues to support this effort. We should end this debate and send an important message to the people we represent: we are listening. We will not auction off your natural legacy to powerful special interests. We will follow Mo's wise counsel and do it right, for now and for our children.

SENATE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Title IV of Senate Resolution 4, agreed to by the Senate on February 4, 1977, calls for establishment of a system for a computerized schedule of all meetings and hearings of Senate committees, subcommittees, joint committees, and committees of conference. This title requires all such committees to notify the Office of the Senate Daily Digest—designated by the Rules Committee—of the time, place, and purpose of the meetings, when scheduled, and any cancellations or changes in the meetings as they occur.

As an additional procedure along with the computerization of this information, the Office of the Senate Daily Digest will prepare this information for

printing in the Extensions of Remarks section of the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD on Monday and Wednesday of each week.

Meetings scheduled for Thursday, March 6, 1997, may be found in the Daily Digest of today's RECORD.

MEETINGS SCHEDULED

MARCH 7

9:30 a.m.
Joint Economic
To hold hearings to examine the employment-unemployment situation for February.
1334 Longworth Building

10:00 a.m.
Rules and Administration
To hear and consider the Committee on Governmental Affairs' request for additional funding.
SR-301

MARCH 10

1:30 p.m.
Governmental Affairs
Oversight of Government Management and The District of Columbia Subcommittee
To hold hearings to review management issues for the Department of Commerce.
SD-342

MARCH 11

9:00 a.m.
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
To hold hearings on proposed legislation authorizing funds for agricultural research.
SR-332

9:30 a.m.
Appropriations
VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies Subcommittee
To hold hearings on proposed budget estimates for fiscal year 1998 for the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the Consumer Information Center, and the Office of Consumer Affairs.
SD-138

Judiciary
To hold joint hearings with the House Judiciary's Subcommittee on the Constitution to examine issues relating to partial birth abortion.
SD-G50

Labor and Human Resources
Employment and Training Subcommittee
To hold hearings to review Federal job training programs.
SD-430

Indian Affairs
Business meeting, to consider pending calendar business.
SR-485

10:00 a.m.
Appropriations
Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
To hold hearings on proposed budget estimates for fiscal year 1998 for Food and Consumer Service, Department of Agriculture.
SD-124

Armed Services
To resume hearings on proposed legislation authorizing funds for fiscal year 1998 for the Department of Defense and the future years defense program, focusing on the unified commands military strategies and operational requirements.
SD-106