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Conversation Contents

Interior to move quickly on ANWR leasing — Murkowski

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Subject: Interior to move quickly on ANWR leasing — Murkowski

Interior to move quickly on ANWR leasing — Murkowski

Margaret Kriz Hobson, E&E News reporter
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ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) said Monday that the Interior Department is moving quickly to offer an oil and gas lease sale in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge within the next three years, before President Trump's first term ends.

In a speech to an Anchorage business group, Murkowski also noted that Deputy Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt is planning a trip to Alaska in the coming months to lay the groundwork for working with state residents on a drilling program.

Bernhardt, the department's point person on ANWR leasing, plans to meet with residents of Kaktovik, the only Native village located within the coastal plain of the wildlife refuge.

"The push right now within Interior is to [issue leases] before four years," Murkowski said. "They are working fairly and aggressively to put in place, to lay the groundwork for what comes next ... because once you get those leases out into the hands of those who can then move forward, it's tougher to throw the roadblocks in place."

But Alaska's senior senator warned that environmental opponents are already planning to go to court in an effort to block oil development on the coastal plain.

"We're fooling ourselves to think that we're going to get a free pass on this, that it will not be litigated," she said. "This is Alaska, and this is the oil industry. You pretty much know that it will come our way."

Murkowski, chairwoman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, also said she's working on a separate ANWR bill focused on requiring regulators to conduct health impact studies and air monitoring in Kaktovik.

Those provisions were included in her earlier ANWR measures but were removed last month when congressional Republicans voted to open ANWR's coastal plain as part of their sweeping overhaul of the U.S. tax code.

Under Senate rules, "anything that was not directly related to revenue raising, or that was determined to be not substantially necessary, had to be scrapped" from the budget reconciliation bill, she explained.

Now, Murkowski hopes to pass a separate ANWR bill and add it to an upcoming must-pass Senate measure. "As you know, in the Senate, vehicles are what you look for," she said. "And we would look to do that. But in terms of timing, we haven't scheduled anything yet."

New bill 'in the queue'

Murkowski also noted that she's already begun working with Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) to draft an updated energy package. That measure, which she described as a "refreshed bill," would include language on cybersecurity, liquefied natural gas exports and renewable energy. It would also incorporate the concerns voiced last year by House lawmakers.

The new bill is "in the queue to be teed up on the Senate calendar," she said.

Last week, Cantwell, the ranking member of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, released a series of bills that would address grid modernization and security, the energy workforce, and smart building concerns ([Greenwire](#), Feb. 19).

Murkowski and Cantwell are hoping to pair their measure with a congressional infrastructure bill, which would likely touch on similar issues.

But Murkowski's energy bill could face a bumpy road in the House. At the Anchorage business meeting, Alaska Rep. Don Young (R) warned that Cantwell angered House Republicans by