

December 18, 2020

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL OPPOSES FEDERAL EFFORT TO SELL OIL AND GAS LEASES IN THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today joined a coalition of 13 attorneys general in [submitting comments](#) with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) opposing the federal government’s plan to sell oil and gas leases in the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, rushing the process with unprecedented haste before the scheduled public comment period has closed.

In the comments, Raoul and the coalition explain that on Nov. 17, the BLM issued a 30-day call for nominations and comment seeking public input on what tracts of land should be offered for sale and lease conditions. But on Dec. 7, the BLM issued a notice that it would hold a sale on Jan. 6, 2021, specifying areas to be offered, lease terms, conditions, and special stipulations, cutting short the deadline to accept all nominations and comments. Raoul and the coalition argue that noticing a lease sale well before the close of the 30-day comment deadline denies members of the public and industry the chance to have their voices heard.

“This leasing program ignores the harmful impacts of climate change and could result in irreparable damage to our nation’s ecosystem and wildlife for years to come,” Raoul said. “Expediting this process before the public comment period has closed ignores these facts and denies the public opportunity to express their concerns. I will continue to defend against unlawful policies and programs like this that put our environment at risk.”

The Arctic Refuge, often referred to as “America’s Serengeti,” is home to a diverse array of wildlife that relies on its fragile ecosystem. The Refuge’s 1.56 million acre Coastal Plain is considered to be a national treasure, unparalleled in its biological significance for hundreds of species, including caribou, polar bears, grizzly bears, wolves and migratory birds. This fragile Arctic and Coastal Plain ecosystem is particularly vulnerable to environmental stressors, including climate change, which has caused thinning sea ice and thawing of permafrost in the region.

Congress successfully protected the region from oil and gas exploration, drilling and production for more than 40 years, until a provision in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act opened the door for oil and gas lease sales. The federal government’s current plans have for the first time exposed the entire, unspoiled Coastal Plain to leasing, exploration, and development, which is not needed to meet the country’s demand for oil and natural gas or for U.S. energy independence.

In today’s comments, Raoul and the coalition argue that the federal government cannot lawfully offer any tracts for lease at this time because the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Lease Program violates multiple federal laws and relies on a wholly deficient and unlawful environmental review. The comments call for the lease sale on Jan. 6, 2021 to be canceled because the BLM unlawfully:

- Failed to fully assess the Coastal Plain lease program’s significant environmental harms.
- Adopted a deficient and unlawful climate analysis of harms due to increased greenhouse gas emissions from the lease program.
- Failed to adequately study the lease program’s impacts on migratory birds.
- Unlawfully prioritized oil and gas development over the Arctic Refuge’s conservation purposes.

Raoul and the coalition also argue that any leases executed now from awarded bids will fall far short of ever generating revenue sufficient to satisfy the Tax Act and the \$1.1 billion in federal tax revenue Congress intended, because Arctic Refuge oil reserves currently are uneconomic to develop and likely will remain so.

Joining Raoul in the comments are the attorneys general of Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington.