

### Measures Seeks to Block Bush Administration Efforts to Drill for Oil Without Any Safeguards for Polar Bear Habitat

*Washington, DC* - In an effort to protect polar bears from becoming extinct due to global warming and oil drilling in their natural habitat, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) joined Congressman Jay Inslee (D-WA) today in the House to introduce the Polar Bear Seas Protection Act. The bill's introduction comes on the same day that the Bush administration listed the polar bear as a threatened species, but included loopholes in the listing that will almost certainly enable more unnecessary oil drilling to take place in the middle of the polar bears' habitat.

"The Bush administration continues to ignore the very serious consequences of its addiction to drilling for oil in environmentally sensitive areas," Hinchey said. "While listing the polar bear as a threatened species is better than nothing, it is far too little and comes far too late. Given this administration's infatuation with giving away public land for unnecessary oil development, I am convinced that the Interior Department will in fact use the loophole it established today to exempt oil development from the list of prohibited activities, making the bill we are introducing today as important as ever."

Hinchey and Inslee's Polar Bear Seas Protection Act requires that oil spill prevention and cleanup standards be in place before any drilling can take place in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas. The bill would direct the National Research Council to gather information and report on how climate change is impacting the ecology of living marine resources in the so-called Polar Bear Seas, and how oil and gas-related activities could affect plant and animal species, marine and coastal environments, and Alaskan Native communities and their subsistence activities. It would also direct the Interior Department to designate critical habitat areas for the polar bear, and require vastly improved oil spill response technologies prior to embarking on massive new oil and gas operations in these pristine waters.

There is overwhelming evidence that polar bears are imperiled in the face of global warming. In 2007, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) released a series of reports that concluded shrinking sea ice caused by global warming could eliminate two-thirds of the world's polar bears - and all

of those in Alaska - in the next 50 years.

"The fact of the matter is that listing the polar bear as threatened is nice, but things won't get better for the bear or for that matter humans, until we stop leasing off acres of polar bear habitat for drilling and finally shift our emphasis away from oil and other fossil fuels and towards solar and other forms of renewable power," Hinchey said.

In the wake of delays by the Fish and Wildlife Service in determining whether to list the polar bear as a threatened species, the Bush administration's Minerals Management Service (MMS) has already finalized decisions to open areas for oil and gas development in the Chukchi Sea. Lease Sale Area 193 is an area that is prime habitat for these mammals.

Hinchey and Inslee argued that it makes no sense to add to the threat global warming poses to polar bears with massive oil and gas development in their habitat, development which will put the species at further risk from potential spills, onshore infrastructure and further disturbance from major industrial activities. Ironically, because of MMS's premature action, the oil and gas produced from these leases will increase the very emissions of greenhouse gases responsible for melting the Arctic sea ice far into the future, further jeopardizing polar bear habitat.