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Agnew's "Disservice" to Ecology

Vice President Agnew has added environmentalists to the group of citizens whom he has castigated, presumably on behalf of the administration. He has done so in a manner which misstates the issues and has therefore done the public a disservice. Sadly, the distortion seems to derive from an effort to exploit, politically, an issue in which the short term gains for the Republicans, or Democrats, are dwarfed by the long term implications for society as a whole and for Alaska in particular.

In his July 24th speech, given in Fairbanks, Alaska, Mr. Agnew asserted that environmental opposition to the proposed Trans-Alaska Pipeline, a project to transport oil from the North Slope, was an example of the "antiprogress" attitude which, in his view, characterizes the environmental movement. His example in fact suggests an opposite conclusion.

Environmentalists seek, as Mr. Agnew says he does, informed progress without needless environmental damage. With respect to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, environmentalists have argued primarily in favor of alternatives to hasty development of Alaska's resources.

Specifically, we have urged deferral of the pipeline project for a period of several years during which an informed and national plan for development can be established. Then consideration can be given to constructing the oil pipeline through Canada along the same route as the proposed natural gas pipeline from Alaska. The Canadian alternative would minimize environmental destruction by utilizing only one pipeline corridor

instead of two. Most importantly, the Canadian route would eliminate entirely the prospect of serious marine oil pollution caused by transporting oil from Southern Alaska to the West Coast in supertankers.

All studies of the environmental effects of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, including the Department of Interior's own impact statement, have shown that the alternatives advocated by many environmentalists are superior. Yet the administration, allegedly in the name of "progress," insists upon proceeding pell mell with the pipeline as proposed by industry.

The Vice President surely was aware of the studies which indicate there is a better way to develop Alaskan resources. He must know of the responsible position environmentalists have taken on the pipeline and other issues. While we believe that the administration too often bends to economic pressure from industry at the expense of the environment, we will continue to offer constructive and responsible suggestions for informed progress. We will seek to resolve the conflicts between the economic and environmental needs, both for present and future generations of Americans.

Intemperate and inaccurate speeches, such as Mr. Agnew's, only serve to alienate concerned environmentalists who seek meaningful cooperation with government and industry so that progress can occur without senseless environmental destruction.

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