

Eshoo: Protect Public Lands from Oil Refineries

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Republican leaders today blocked Rep. Anna G. Eshoo's (D-Palo Alto) amendment to the Gasoline for America's Security (GAS) Act. The amendment would have protected sensitive public lands from refinery development, but the amendment was blocked by the House Rules Committee.

The GAS Act would allow the President to designate federal lands suitable for construction of refineries, and allow greater access to these lands with limited judicial review or public input. He could designate environmentally sensitive areas such as wildlife refuges, national forests, and national conservation areas.

"This bill is premised on the fiction that our energy production is limited by the environmental regulation placed on oil refineries, which is clearly not the case," said Eshoo. "But whether we need new refineries or not, we should not allow the President to be able to provide access to some of our most treasured federal lands to the oil and gas industry."

The Eshoo Amendment would protect national forests, the national trails system, national conservation areas, wilderness study areas and other public lands from development for oil refineries. Perhaps most prominently, Eshoo's amendment would have protected the 74 million acres within the National Wildlife Refuge System. According to a recent report released by the Department of the Interior, refuges not only attracted 37 million visitors in 2004 for recreational purposes, they also created 24,000 jobs and produced \$454 million in employment income during 2004 as well.

"I can't imagine why a president would want to clear the path for building a new refinery in Chincoteague, Virginia or in Arkansas' Cache River Refuge where the long-lost Ivory-billed woodpecker has been rediscovered. And why would Congress want to give him the chance," said Eshoo.

The bill also failed to adequately address price gouging and manipulation by oil companies. Eshoo voted for alternative legislation which would have made price gouging punishable by fines of up to \$3 million and market manipulation punishable by fines of up to \$1 million.

"I think we're seeing a replay of the California energy 'crisis,'" said Eshoo. "Now, like then, we have an industry that has reduced its own capacity to drive up prices. It's claiming that environmental regulations are the cause and consumers are paying the price."

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