

# ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS

Opinions

## Alaska is past due for reality check on environment versus development

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Along with all the logistical preparations for President Obama's visit here beginning today, we've seen the advance political posturing and public messaging that highlights so much of our countries' increasingly misdirected debate on natural resource development, energy and environmental policies. This debate is increasingly driven by people from various perspectives trying to praise, condemn and twist the value of government policies to fit their specific agendas.

President Barack Obama's carefully scripted and timed visit will undoubtedly include photo opportunities and sound bites around his administration's policies on environmental and Arctic issues. Naysayers at the national level, including many in the news media and various interest groups, are already using the opportunity of the president's visit to advance their causes, furthering a continuing trend of dumbing-down public policy debate into short sound bite themes and bumper sticker slogans, thinking and rhetoric.

All of this current theater playing out highlights a deepening disconnect in our societal understanding and decision-making around all of the things we want (i-devices, hybrid cars and windmills, kayaks, cleats and crampons), and where the materials for these things should come from. It is a growing disconnect between basic questions of production and consumption.

A classic example is the current societal wave demanding more renewables and alternatives, which largely ignores the basic question of where the natural resources needed to produce these things will come from. Hybrid cards, windmills and solar panels all require energy to produce, and include large amounts of copper, zinc, molybdenum, and other specialized metals. Our growing demand for i-devices and modern high-end recreational equipment is also based on a readily available supply of petroleum and mining products, products Alaska can and has produced to the highest global standards. Yet virtually no one in the national media asked a basic question of the recent armada of protesters in petroleum product-based kayaks in Seattle or metal-based climbing gear rappelling down the St. John's Bridge in Portland, Oregon as they protested and tried to stop some of Shell's vast navy of vessels mobilized for Arctic drilling. That question is -- where do they propose to get the materials needed for their kayaks and climbing gear from, if not Alaska?

This underlying question goes to who has the highest environmental standards and practices around the globe to produce these things responsibly? Those who say production should not be in the U.S., not in Alaska, not in the Arctic, or not in my backyard, should be asked: If not here, then where? Especially when the alternative is to rely more and more on developing nations as sources for our energy and minerals. Places with lower environmental standards and practices.

Energy development on the North Slope and mineral development at Red Dog Mine are global examples of doing it right. Examples that must be a part of the rationale for Obama's "all of the above" energy development policy, and examples of why his administration has supported offshore Arctic OCS energy development based on its strongly stated view that the U.S. has the highest environmental standards and technology necessary to develop the Arctic offshore responsibly.

Done right, with modern science and technology, the economic activity and wealth created by energy and mineral development funds education, public health and other programs for people who need help the most, affords greater environmental protection and stewardship, and more parks, sports and recreation programs and projects for society.

We can have both environmental protection and natural resource development. The two go hand in hand. Hopefully the president's visit will highlight this based on science and data, rather than bumper sticker rhetoric and photo opportunities.

*David Parish is an Alaskan who has been involved in Alaska natural resource public policy issues for 30 years.*

*The views expressed here are the writer's own and are not necessarily endorsed by Alaska Dispatch News, which welcomes a broad range of viewpoints. To submit a piece for consideration, email [commentary\(at\)alaskadispatch.com](mailto:commentary(at)alaskadispatch.com)*

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