

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 28, 2010

The Honorable Frank Lautenberg
United States Senator
Hart Office Building 324
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Lautenberg:

I was disappointed by a *New York Times* story of June 24 criticizing an oil development project in my state which was incomplete at best and seriously exaggerated at worst. Unfortunately, your office apparently based a letter to federal regulatory officials and a news release on that flawed story. I know you have a soft spot in your heart for Alaska, as evidenced by your visit here last summer. Although I very much share your frustration with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, halting a project important to my constituents which is still in the permitting process is premature and inappropriate.

The Liberty project under development by BP just west of Alaska's Prudhoe Bay oil fields is an international model in state-of-the-art energy production technology. Still months from actual drilling, Liberty will use existing gravel pads and causeways from the Endicott oil field, which has been safely producing oil since 1987. From this pad built in just 4 to 10 feet of water, the company will use extended reach drilling to tap the Liberty Reservoir an amazing eight miles away. BP already has successfully produced oil three and a half miles away on Alaska's North Slope using this low impact, footprint-reducing technology. Liberty will produce an estimated 40,000 barrels of oil a day.

Comparisons between the Liberty project and the tragic Gulf spill are simply inaccurate. The Deepwater Horizon spill is in 5,000 feet of water 50 miles from shore; Liberty will be on a gravel island in shallow water within the Beaufort Sea's barrier islands and connected to the Prudhoe Bay road system. The Deepwater Horizon spill apparently resulted from a massive malfunction from a semi-submersible drilling rig; Liberty will be developed from a 33-acre gravel contained island. The oil from the broken Deepwater Horizon rig is surging into open waters of the Gulf of Mexico; by the time Liberty starts development, the island will be surrounded by protection berms and solid ice and reachable by vehicles in about 15 minutes.

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The Liberty project already has been the subject of some of the most intense government and public scrutiny of any oil development project in America. It requires permitting by the North Slope Borough, the State of Alaska and federal government, with whom BP has work on its development plans. These plans have been modified to accommodate the recommendations of public and private sector experts, including the Eskimo Whaling Commission. The development is broadly supported by the Inupiat Eskimo residents of the North Slope Borough who depend on the region's wildlife for their subsistence needs.

We must react to the Gulf spill sensibly to safeguard our economic prosperity and national security. Until the Deepwater Horizon spill, the residents of my state suffered the impacts of the nation's largest oil spill ever with the Exxon Valdez. We led the way by supporting tougher national laws and oil transportation procedures, including double-hulled tankers, tractor tug escorts and better citizen oversight of the industry. Today Alaskans broadly support responsible oil and gas development because we know producing American energy creates thousands of American jobs and protects our national energy security.

I certainly welcome increased review and oversight of our nation's oil and gas industry, including in Alaska. But shutting down an environmentally responsible development project before it has even begun is short-sighted and unacceptable to me and my constituents.

Sincerely,



Mark Begich
United States Senator

CC: Interior Secretary Ken Salazar