

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

The President's Weekly Address

August 29, 2015

Hi, everybody. This Monday, I'm heading to Alaska for a 3-day tour of the State. Now, I've been looking forward to this for a long time, not only because Alaska is one of the most beautiful places in a country that's full of beautiful places, but because I'll have several opportunities to meet with everyday Alaskans about what's going on in their lives. I'll travel throughout the State, meeting with Alaskans who live above the Arctic Circle, with Alaska Natives, and with folks who earn their livelihoods through fishing and tourism. And I expect to learn a lot.

One thing I've learned so far is that a lot of these conversations begin with climate change. And that's because Alaskans are already living with its effects: more frequent and extensive wildfires, bigger storm surges as sea ice melts faster, some of the swiftest shoreline erosion in the world, in some places, more than 3 feet a year.

Alaska's glaciers are melting faster too, threatening tourism and adding to rising seas. And if we do nothing, Alaskan temperatures are projected to rise between 6 and 12 degrees by the end of the century, changing all sorts of industries forever.

This is all real. This is happening to our fellow Americans right now. In fact, Alaska's Governor recently told me that four villages are in "imminent danger" and have to be relocated. Already, rising sea levels are beginning to swallow one island community.

Think about that. If another country threatened to wipe out an American town, we'd do everything in our power to protect ourselves. Climate change poses the same threat right now.

That's why one of the things I'll do while I'm in Alaska is to convene other nations to meet this threat. Several Arctic nations have already committed to action. And since the United States and China worked together to set ambitious climate targets last year, leading by example, many of the world's biggest emitters have come forward with new climate plans of their own. And that's a good sign as we approach this December's global climate negotiations in Paris.

Now, one of the ways America is leading is by transitioning away from dirty energy sources that threaten our health and our environment and by going all-in on clean, renewable energy sources like wind and solar. And Alaska has the natural resources to be a global leader in this effort.

Now, even as we accelerate this transition, our economy still has to rely on oil and gas. And as long as that's the case, I believe we should rely more on domestic production than on foreign imports and we should demand the highest safety standards in the industry: our own. Still, I know that there are Americans who are concerned about oil companies drilling in environmentally sensitive waters. Some are also concerned with my administration's decision to approve Shell's application to drill a well off the Alaskan coast, using leases they purchased before I took office. I share people's concerns about offshore drilling. I remember the BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico all too well.

And that's precisely why my administration has worked to make sure that our oil exploration conducted under these leases is done at the highest safety standards possible, with

requirements specifically tailored to the risks of drilling off Alaska. We don't rubberstamp permits. We make it clear that Shell has to meet our high standards in how they conduct their operations, and it's a testament to how rigorously we've applied those standards that Shell has delayed and limited its exploration off Alaska while trying to meet them. The bottom line is, safety has been and will continue to be my administration's top priority when it comes to oil and gas exploration off America's precious coasts, even as we push our economy and the world to ultimately transition off of fossil fuels.

So I'm looking forward to talking with Alaskans about how we can work together to make America the leader on climate change around the globe. And we're going to offer unique and engaging ways for you to join me on this trip all week at whitehouse.gov/Alaska. Because what's happening in Alaska is happening to us. It's our wakeup call. And as long as I'm President, America will lead the world to meet the threat of climate change before it's too late.

Thanks, and have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 1:25 p.m. on August 28 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on August 29. In the address, the President referred to Gov. William M. Walker of Alaska. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 28, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on August 29.

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