

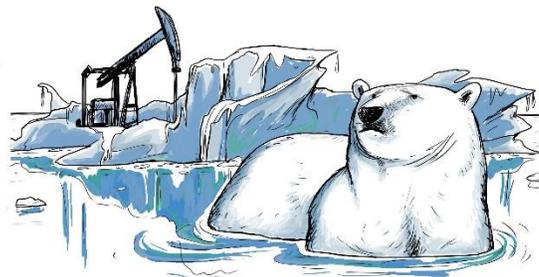
## ***Arctic Offshore Drilling***

Offshore oil and gas reserves, primarily along coastlines in Alaska, California, Louisiana, and Texas, account for a large proportion of the oil and gas supply in the United States. In August 2015, President Obama authorized Royal Dutch Shell to expand drilling off Alaska's northwest coast. His decision brought into sharp relief the different, oftentimes competing views on the expansion of offshore drilling.

Many proponents of offshore drilling argue that tapping into the vast amount of oil and gas reserves in the Arctic will help shore up national security interests for the United States, bolster its economy and workforce, and offer Americans a reliable, safe supply of oil. According to Robert Bryce, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, there are "enormous amounts of recoverable energy resources in the Arctic. The Department of Energy estimates them at something on the order of 400 billion barrels of oil equivalent in natural gas and oil. That's four times the crude oil reserves of Kuwait." Framed this way, drilling in the Arctic presents a way for Americans to mitigate risks from dependence on foreign oil and build the local and national economies by creating jobs and supplying cheap oil.

A competing point of view charges that offshore oil drilling poses immense risk to the environment while reinforcing a reliance on dirty, environmentally unfriendly sources of energy. Critics claim that industrial activity associated with offshore drilling in the Arctic could harm native animals, including polar bears, walrus, seals, and whales already jeopardized by climate warming and declining levels of sea ice. Environmentalists argue that oil companies have not demonstrated the capability to clean up an oil spill in water obstructed by ice. Furthermore, they contend, extracting oil only perpetuates a fossil-fuel economy and will contribute dangerously to rising global temperature thereby exacerbating climate change.

"Granting Shell the permit to drill in the Arctic was the wrong decision, and this fight is far from over," said Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club. "The people will continue to call on President Obama to protect the Arctic and our environment."



### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Do you find one framing of the situation more compelling than the other? Why? In what ways do your own beliefs or opinions affect your perspective on this issue?
2. If you were in President Obama's position, how might the different ways of framing this issue affect your decision-making process? Is it possible to make an objective decision in the case of Arctic drilling? How might you come to a decision that is both reasonable and ethically defensible?

3. Can you think of other ethical dilemmas that are unexplored or absent in these dominant, competing frames of offshore drilling? How might these additional issues affect the decision to drill in the Arctic?
4. Do you think there are unintended or undesirable consequences of framing Arctic drilling as an “either-or” issue, i.e. as one that pits environmentalists against business leaders? Why or why not?
5. Can you think of an example of another contentious issue that has been framed in an “either-or” way? What would be an ethically ideal way to resolve this issue and why?

**Resources:**

Obama’s Alaska controversies: Denali, oil drilling, climate change

[http://www.mercurynews.com/nation-world/ci\\_28732579/obamas-alaska-controversies-denali-oil-drilling-climate-change](http://www.mercurynews.com/nation-world/ci_28732579/obamas-alaska-controversies-denali-oil-drilling-climate-change)

Does allowing Arctic offshore drilling undermine Obama’s climate efforts?

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/allowing-arctic-offshore-drilling-undermine-obamas-climate-efforts/>

U.S. lets Shell drill for oil off Alaska

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2015/08/17/shell-arctic-alaska/31890239/>

Feds allow Shell to drill for oil in Arctic Ocean off Alaska

<http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/feds-allow-shell-to-drill-for-oil-in-arctic-ocean-off-alaska/>

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