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The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held an oversight hearing on “Arctic Resources and American Competitiveness” to discuss exploratory oil and gas drilling on the Arctic Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). The hearing covered the Department of the Interior’s (DOI) proposed regulations for drilling on the OCS, which were released on February 20. Testimony and questioning focused on whether drilling is prudent in such an inaccessible location and whether current technology and best practices can prevent an environmental disaster.

Richard Glenn of the Arctic Slope Regional Group noted that oil and gas extraction provides a substantial number of jobs to residents of northern Alaska and receives support from many locals. Critics of the DOI regulations questioned the need to place a second rig on site to drill same-season relief wells in the event of a blowout and challenged the proposal to shorten the Arctic drilling season to allow time to shut down defective wells. Christine Resler of Schlumberger pointed out that once new technologies are tested and used in the Arctic, these technologies will improve.

Brian Salerno of the DOI testified that despite its shallow-water setting, the Arctic OCS is too dangerous and remote to accommodate unproven technologies, or even some technologies that are robust in temperate climates. Michael LeVine of Oceana said that “there is no proven way to respond to spilled oil in Arctic conditions,” and warned that traditional methods of oil spill mitigation would be hampered by sea ice and lack of infrastructure.

Sources: E&E News, House.gov, Oil and Gas Journal
