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Office of the White House Press Secretary

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THE WHITE HOUSE

## STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Last March, my Administration proposed legislation to the Congress to speed the flow of natural gas from our vast reserves in Alaska to consumers in the lower 48 States. I am pleased today to sign S. 3521, the Alaska Natural Gas Transportation Act of 1976, which meets the essential objective of that proposal.

Our nation must develop and produce new sources of this vital fuel. The North Slope of Alaska, with the largest known U.S. gas reserves, can supply over 1 trillion cubic feet of gas per year by 1985. This represents reducing U.S. oil import needs by about one-half million barrels per day. This will be a significant step towards energy independence. If the next Congress acts on my proposal for deregulation of new natural gas prices, long-term relief from natural gas shortages can be achieved.

Three proposals for transporting Alaskan gas to the lower 48 States have been filed officially with the Federal Power Commission. This bill establishes an expedited process so that the President and the Congress can make a decision on a route expeditiously.

The bill will mandate the prompt issuance of all necessary certificates, permits, leases, rights-of-way, and other authorizations to expedite the initial construction of the route chosen. To ensure adequate environmental safeguards, no final decision will be made unless all appropriate Environmental Impact Statements have been completed. The bill also limits to some degree the scope and timing of judicial review, consistent with constitutional safeguards, so that the gas will flow as soon as possible.

The Alaska Natural Gas Transportation Act of 1976 contains several procedural sections which are significantly different from those proposed by the Administration. If it appears that these provisions will hinder the purposes of the bill, I will seek legislative remedies.

The passage of this Act is one of the early steps ultimately leading to the building of a natural gas pipeline -- the largest private construction project ever to be undertaken. The building of this pipeline exemplifies the role that the private sector must take as we continue our efforts to increase our energy supplies. The role of the Federal Government in this case is to ensure an expeditious decision so that construction delays will be avoided.

In my 1975 State of the Union Message, I set forth this nation's first energy goals and comprehensive program for achieving energy independence. Since that time, I have proposed over 20 specific measures to promote energy conservation and develop our domestic energy resources.

With the signing of this piece of legislation, nine of my energy proposals are now law. While there is still much to be done, we have made substantial progress -- and we will build upon it.

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