Drill, Baby, Drill?

As Vice Presidential candidate in 2008, Sarah Palin made the news when she eagerly promoted offshore drilling for oil and gas in Alaska. Her declaration of “Drill, baby, drill!” was greeted with an eruption of applause from supporters. With high gas prices and America’s dependence on imported oil, it’s easy to understand why many Americans want to drill for oil at home. Using more American oil could mean lower prices at the pump.

However, the idea of drilling in Alaska has set up a showdown of environmental activists versus drilling supporters. Activists worry that construction of oil rigs could disrupt the fragile balance of one of America’s few remaining pristine areas. One example cited by activists is the beluga whale, a protected animal under the Endangered Species Act. They say that by increasing industrial activity near the beluga habitat, the population of 300 whales could be further harmed—possibly even wiped out.

After much reflection, President Barack Obama proposed a plan in 2010 to allow more offshore drilling, but mainly in the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. This compromise hasn’t really made either side of the debate happy. Many devoted environmental activists think there should be no drilling at all, while drilling supporters want to see even more areas (such as Alaska) opened up to exploration for oil and gas. No doubt the controversy will continue for many years to come.