

**Hearing on H.R. 1146**  
**“Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection**  
**Act”**

**Full Written Statement of Matthew Rexford**  
Native Village of Kaktovik  
Tribal Administrator

Before the  
United States House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources

**March 26, 2019**



My name is Matthew Rexford. I am here today as Tribal Administrator of the Native Village of Kaktovik, a federally recognized tribe. I am here to tell you that I exist! We exist! The 200 plus residents of Kaktovik, my uncle Fenton sitting next to me, we all exist! Collectively, we are the Kaktovikmiut, residents of the only village within the so-called 1002 Area, and the only community within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Your legislation erases our 11,000 years of existence on our land and follows a predictable pattern for the federal government. We thought you had learned from past mistakes. We thought we were fortunate in Alaska to hold on to our lands because we hadn't ceded them through treaty or hostile occupation, but here we are. It is 2019 and you have eliminated us.

You speak about human rights. Certainly, it is our human right to at least be acknowledged in any legislation that with the sweep of a pen would undo the self-determination and opportunity that my uncle and other leaders in Kaktovik, people who are now elders, have worked tirelessly to secure.

My community does exist, on the Northeastern coast of Alaska along the shores of the Beaufort Sea. In the past, our tribe travelled freely over 23 million acres of land. Now, we are severely restricted in our travel into what you call ANWR. In the summer months, we are only permitted to travel up river corridors and drainages, forbidden to use modern modes of transportation like all-terrain vehicles that indigenous peoples across North America have adopted to facilitate travel across vast swaths of lands that are their homelands and birthright. I myself have travelled to almost every part of our traditional lands, visiting relatives in Canada by boat, snow machining to important hunting and campsites throughout the Coastal Plain and even beyond the foothills of the Brooks Range into the greater Refuge. Your bill gives the false perception that these lands are a "wilderness," when they are not and never have been. I follow in the footsteps of my ancestors who have traversed these lands for thousands of years. The entire Coastal Plain of this Refuge has been continuously inhabited and used by the Iñupiaq. It was never "wild" until we became a part of America. Tribal members from the Native Village of Kaktovik have proven our existence in many historical documents should you care to do more research.

You are concerned about the caribou. Here is what the Kaktovikmiut know to be true. The Porcupine Caribou Herd's migration changes every year. In the last 10-15 years, we have seen their migration change to be in the far southeastern portion of the Coastal Plain and more into Canada. The scientific data collected by both federal and state scientists supports our Traditional Knowledge in this. According to the data presented in the Fish and Wildlife Service's Arctic Refuge CCP released in 2015, the entire Coastal Plain makes up a mere 17% of the entire Porcupine calving area.

You are concerned about the polar bears. So are we. When Polar Bears were listed as a threatened species, the USA was mandated to gather scientific data on the bears to study the health of the population in Alaska. The Fish and Wildlife Service conducted an unprecedented and highly invasive study of the entire polar bear population in Alaska.

The study took place at sensitive times of the year for polar bear, as they were first emerging from their dens and then again, when they were looking for their dens. In Kaktovik, we saw bears with collars so tight their fur had rubbed off and their necks gangrened. I believe that the continued invasive scientific studies of the Fish and Wildlife Service, through their contractors, their authorized bear harassers, are causing more harm to the polar bear than almost anything else they face.

You are concerned about the Arctic culture. Studies show that the North Slope region has the highest per capita harvest of subsistence food in Alaska. We have the greatest stake in protecting our traditional ways of life. We have been working diligently with the BLM, through their NEPA analysis and our role as a Cooperating Agency, to identify those places. Our local government keeps a robust inventory of traditional land use sites, cultural sites, campsites, and burial grounds. North Slope standards The North Slope Borough Iñupiat Heritage, Language, and Culture Department has continuously updated their robust inventory of traditional land use sites, cultural sites, campsites, and burial grounds; those places have been and will continue to be protected. These are standards on the North Slope.

You are concerned about climate change; so are we. We are on the front lines of climate change. We are experiencing longer ice-free seasons, melting permafrost, and more coastal erosion, among other things. We bear this burden though we, as indigenous people with a heavy reliance on subsistence, contribute minimally to emissions. Travelling 4,500 miles from Kaktovik to Washington to prove our existence and advocate for my people is certainly one of the larger emissions that I produce all year. The draft EIS for leasing in the Coastal Plain concludes that ANWR development would increase global emissions by an average of 44 thousand metric tons per year. To put this into perspective, the 53 Representatives from California, in total, produce over 200,000 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> in travel between Washington DC and the State of California every year, orders of magnitude greater than the total emissions from developing ANWR. And that's assuming that we ever even get to the development stage, which is years in the future! We are only asking for a chance to see what gifts God has bestowed upon our land. The same chance that the Gwich'in people asked for two decades ago. I can't help but think that if they had found oil in their lands, we would not be having this conversation today.

Perhaps the Representatives from California would prefer to travel on oil imported from foreign countries with less strict environmental standards, but we would like a piece of the pie. You consume. The average American consumes. And yet you ask us to bear the burden of mitigation so that you don't have to. It's easy for you to take ANWR off the table. It checks a lot of boxes for your constituents, to be sure: it checks the environmental box, it gives the illusion of supporting Indigenous peoples, cherished wilderness – check. It certainly checks the public perception box that environmental corporations and the outdoor industry have spent so much money to create.

If you are concerned about the balance we have been working to cultivate on the North Slope between protecting our environment, wildlife, and subsistence while our economy relies heavily on responsible resource development; you should ask the experts – **us**. The Kaktovikmiut know these lands and the wildlife that rely on them better than any scientist, agency, hunting guide, eco-tourist, or lawmaker ever can. We heard the same concerns 50 years ago when oil discoveries were made in Prudhoe. We were told the caribou would be decimated, our lands ruined, our subsistence and culture wiped out. As it happens, none of this came to fruition. In fact, the population of the Central Arctic Herd, which calves near Prudhoe Bay, marked a 14-fold increase from when development began in Prudhoe to their peak population in 2008. Our communities on the North Slope have developed a dual economic system in which a modern cash economy and traditional subsistence are interwoven and interdependent, and through which our culture adapts and perpetuates itself. In the Arctic, even science is political.

We will NOT become conservation refugees. We do NOT approve of your efforts to turn our homeland into one giant national park, which would literally guarantee us a fate with no economy, no jobs, reduced subsistence, and no hope for the future of our people. We, as Iñupiat people, have every right to pursue economic, social, and cultural self-determination. The laws of the U.S. should support Indigenous populations, not interfere with these basic rights. Quyanaq for this opportunity to testify.

## **NOTES**

### **Rationale for 200,000 metric tons**

It is 2,442 miles as the crow flies from Washington DC to San Francisco. According to the Emission Inventory Guidebook, a Boeing 737 aircraft produces 11 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> for a 575 mile flight; about a quarter of the total distance to California. One Representative from California traveling one way produces almost 50 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. The Congressional Management Foundation states that the typical House member returns to their district 40 or more times a year. 100 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> round trip X 40 trips per year X 53 California Representatives = about 212,000 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year.

### **Caribou**

Caribou inhabit the 1002 Area and are an important subsistence resource for the Iñupiat people and our Gwich'in neighbors in both Canada and Alaska. Potential impacts of leasing on caribou are well analyzed. While the Coastal Plain is an important area for the Porcupine Caribou Herd (PCH), it is important to consider the following:

- (1) the Gwich'in and Kaktovikmiut harvest both the Central Arctic Herd (CAH) and PCH;
- (2) (2) the coastal plain is a small portion of the PCH total calving area;

- (3) (4) the PCH interacts with development in their migratory range outside of the coastal plain; and
- (4) Caribou are resilient to industry areas.

First, the PCH is an important resource to both Iñupiat and Gwich'in, however according to the 2010 Harvest Management Plan for the Porcupine Caribou Herd in Canada, "Alaska makes up about 15 percent of the total reported harvest of the Porcupine Caribou herd..."<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the PCH are primarily harvested by indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of Canada. Instead, in addition to the PCH, both people of Kaktovik<sup>2</sup> and the Gwich'in of Arctic Village and Venetie<sup>3</sup> harvest from the Central Arctic Herd (CAH) which calve in Prudhoe Bay area and the PCH. This is in part due to the fact that "[T]here is a lot of mixing between the Teshekpuk, Central Arctic, and Porcupine herds."<sup>4</sup> The mixing of the herds is an important detail that showcases the intersectionality of the herds that may lead to members of the PCH calving in industrialized areas and members of other herds being harvested by both the Iñupiat and Gwich'in. It should be noted that although the PCH is an important resource for both the Gwich'in and Iñupiat people, it is not the only herd that is harvested by Alaska Natives in and around ANWR.

Second, the PCH are versatile in their calving and migration patterns across Northern Alaska and Northwest Canada. Within the past twenty years there was a decade when the PCH did not even calve in the Coastal Plain, and in recent years when the PCH did use the Coastal Plain for calving, it did not use the Coastal Plain exclusively. From the 2015 Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), "Between 2002 and 2009, no estimates of abundance were available. During this period, caribou left the coastal plain and the northern foothills of the Arctic Refuge earlier and did not form large post-calving aggregation..."<sup>5</sup> And again, "In 7 of 11 years during 2004-2014, calving occurred on the coastal plain, primarily in the Yukon between the Alaska-Canada border and the Babbage River. In the other 4 years, calving occurred both in Alaska and Canada, and **some** calving occurred in the 1002 area during 3 of those years"<sup>6</sup> [Emphasis added]. The PCH do not reliably calve in the coastal plain each year and that the entire coastal plain is a very small portion of their entire calving region. For perspective, data in the Fish and Wildlife CCP shows that the entire coastal plain makes up a mere 16.8% of the entire PCH calving area. In other words, roughly 83 % of the PCH calving habitat is entirely outside of the coastal plain.

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<sup>1</sup> Harvest Management Plan for the Porcupine Caribou Herd in Canada March 2010 Page 33.

<sup>2</sup> ADF&G Porcupine Caribou Bulletin Summer 2017

"...because the Porcupine caribou] herd does not have a set migratory route they follow every year, the community cannot always rely on them for food. Although community members harvest Porcupine caribou when they are available, they relied much more heavily on the Central Arctic herd in recent years."

<sup>3</sup> Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan. USFWS. January 2015. Page 4-105

<sup>4</sup> ADF&G Porcupine Caribou Bulletin Summer 2017

<sup>5</sup> Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan. USFWS. January 2015. Page 4-99

<sup>6</sup> Species Management Report: Caribou Management Report. ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation. June 2014. Page 15-8.

Third, it is important to consider that the PCH has been exposed to development and infrastructure during their migration. In the course of their migration, the PCH travel through Canada's oil rich Mackenzie River Basin and Eagle Plain Basin and cross the Dempster Highway<sup>7</sup>. In fact, as the Harvest Management Plan for the Porcupine Caribou Herd in Canada details, the Dempster Highway is an important area for hunters and subsistence users to harvest from the PCH.<sup>8</sup> The Dalton Highway is also within the range of the PCH. It should be noted that while development in the Coastal Plain would be new, because of the exposure to development throughout its migration, the PCH may be more habituated to infrastructure and development which could lessen the degree at which caribou are impacted from the oil and gas leasing program. As the EIS for the nearby Point Thomson development reported:

“Studies of interactions between caribou and traffic within the North Slope oil fields have occurred in oil field areas that are closed to hunting and show that caribou, including cows with calves, become tolerant of traffic disturbances during the course of each summer season (Haskell et al. 2006, Haskell and Ballard 2008)” (Page 5-286).

Fourth, it is important to highlight that despite concerns over the decimation of the caribou population, caribou do continue to inhabit areas where industry is present. From the ANWR Leasing Program DEIS ANILCA 810 Analysis: “Caribou could still forage within the total footprint of a Central Processing Facility and its associated satellite well pads, for example.”<sup>9</sup> The Central Arctic Herd (CAH) which frequent the Coastal Plain and ANWR calve in Prudhoe Bay area, one of the most prolific onshore oil and gas developments in the U.S. Both the PCH and CAH also experience a degree of “mixing”<sup>10</sup>, in other words, it is likely that members of the PCH may calve and migrate through Prudhoe Bay with the CAH and vice versa. Despite the presence of oil and gas infrastructure and development, the populations of all three herds are at higher levels than when development first began.

## **Public Health**

The Journal of the American Medical Association published a study in 2017 comparing life longevity in United States counties from 1980 to 2014 titled “Inequalities in Life Expectancy among US Counties 1980-2014: Temporal Trends and Key Drivers.”<sup>11</sup> The study concludes that life expectancy on the North Slope has increased by 13 years over

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<sup>7</sup> Species Management Report: Caribou Management Report. ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation. June 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Harvest Management Plan for the Porcupine Caribou Herd in Canada March 2010 Page 28

<sup>9</sup> ANWR EIS, Appendix E: ANILCA 810 Analysis. Page E-6.

<sup>10</sup> Porcupine Caribou Summer News. Available at:

[http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/home/library/pdfs/wildlife/porcupine\\_caribou\\_news/porcupine\\_caribou\\_news\\_summer\\_2017.pdf](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/home/library/pdfs/wildlife/porcupine_caribou_news/porcupine_caribou_news_summer_2017.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Dwyer-Lindgren L, Bertozzi-Villa A, Stubbs RW, et al. Inequalities in life expectancy among US counties 1980 to 2014. JAMA Intern Med. Doi: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2017.0918. Published online May 8, 2017

the 34 years analyzed. The factors identified as having the most impact on the variation in life expectancy between geographic regions were poverty rate, high school graduation, unemployment, and access to health care. Production began in Prudhoe Bay in 1977 and provided the North Slope Borough with the economic base to provide jobs, education, and health care to our region, which has drastically increased our life expectancy over a relatively short amount of time.

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services has identified poverty as a critical health concern, as it is associated with: food insecurity, inadequate and unhealthy housing, low levels of educational attainment, unemployment, poor access to health care, reduced lifespan, and increased mortality. Health conditions and risk factors associated with poverty include disability status, poor general health, poor mental health, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic lung disease, asthma, obesity, binge drinking, and cigarette smoking.<sup>12</sup>

### **Arctic Culture**

We have the greatest stake in protecting our resources. According to the Baseline Community Health Analysis Report, the North Slope Borough has among the highest per capita harvests of subsistence food in Alaska<sup>13</sup>. Data from the 2003 census shows that virtually all Iñupiat households reported relying on subsistence resources to some extent. Further, studies show income opportunities in Northern Alaska do not appear to substantially affect participation in subsistence activities, and residents state that they would prefer to participate in a combination of wage-based and traditional subsistence activities<sup>14</sup>. Even household heads with full-time employment relied heavily on traditional food sources<sup>15</sup>. What exists in the communities on the North Slope is a dual economic system in which a modern cash economy and traditional subsistence are interwoven and interdependent, and through which our culture adapts and perpetuates itself.

In fact, in many cases, income and employment levels *support* subsistence activities in our communities. People continue to hunt and fish, but aluminum boats, outboards, all-terrain vehicles now help blend these pursuits with wage work. These things cost money and require income and employment to support them.

### **Oil & Gas in Gwich'in Lands**

It is important not to mistakenly view the Gwich'in culture as "anti-development," when in fact Gwich'in communities have also pursued resource development interests in their

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<sup>12</sup> Alaska Department of Health and Social Services: Income and Poverty

<sup>13</sup> Wolfe, R.J.: "Subsistence Food Harvests in Rural Alaska, and Food Safety Issues," Paper pre-sented to the Institute of Medicine, National Academies of Sciences Committee on Environmental Justice, Spokane, Washington, August 13, 1996. Accessed online at <http://www.subsistence.adfg.state.ak.us/download/food962.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Poppel, B., J. Kruse, G. Duhaime, and L. Abryutina. 2007. Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic (SLiCA) [www.arcticlivingconditions.org](http://www.arcticlivingconditions.org)

<sup>15</sup> Baseline Community Health Analysis Report. North Slope Borough Department of Health and Social Services, July 2012.

own lands. In the 1980's the village of Venetie sought to lease all of their lands to oil and gas companies to spur economic development and jobs for their people. In the Senate Congressional Record for March 8, 2000, a letter from the Native Village of Venetie "giving formal notice of intention to offer lands for competitive oil and gas lease. This request for proposals involves any or all of the lands and waters of the Venetie Indian Reservation....which aggregates 1.8 million acres..."<sup>16</sup> Exxon completed seismic in the 1980's and drilled core samples in the Yukon Flats Basin<sup>17</sup>. More recently, Doyon Limited, according to their oil and gas "Acquisition Opportunity" flyer<sup>18</sup>, completed 52 square miles of 3D seismic in the Stevens Village sub-basin of the Yukon Flats in 2013 and is actively seeking lessee's to explore "prospectivity" of its entire 1.48 million acres of "underexplored but highly prospective oil/gas bearing sub-basins" surrounding the Gwich'in villages of Fort Yukon, Stevens Village, Beaver, Birch Creek, and Chalkyitsik.

In Canada, development has occurred in the Eagle Plains and current projects for the Peel Plateau watershed are in the planning process. Both areas lie within the Porcupine Caribou herd's winter range. In May 2018, the Vuntut Gwitchin Government published their Oil and Gas Engagement Policy outlining a policy to "establish a respectful, transparent, and meaningful framework to guide the engagements of the Vuntut Gwitchin Government in relation to Oil and Gas Activities and Oil and Gas Dispositions in a manner that supports and upholds the objective of Sustainable Development." The document further defines Sustainable Development as "beneficial socio-economic change that does not undermine the ecological and social systems upon which communities and societies are dependent." We agree with their policies and would like the opportunity to explore the same opportunities on our own lands.

## **Polar Bears**

While the Southern Beaufort Stock (SBS) of polar bears do utilize the 1002 Area, their habitat expands beyond the coastal plain and the "species is widely distributed at low densities..."<sup>19</sup> The SBS stock of polar bears have a large range from Point Hope to south of Banks Island and east of the Ballie Islands, Canada.<sup>20</sup> The same stock of polar bears utilizing the coastal plain also move through the areas of industry activity seasonally, this suggests that industry activities in the geographical area will have relatively few interactions with polar bears.<sup>21</sup> Further, SBS polar bears do not use the coastal plain exclusively as the SBS spends the majority of the year near the coast,

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<sup>16</sup> Congressional Record – Senate, March 8, 2000 pg. 2242

<sup>17</sup> Yukon Flats Basin, Alaska: Reservoir Characterization Study. State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys 2006. Accessed online: [http://dggs.alaska.gov/webpubs/dggs/ri/text/ri2006\\_001.pdf](http://dggs.alaska.gov/webpubs/dggs/ri/text/ri2006_001.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Acquisition Opportunity – Yukon Flats Basin Central Alaska. <http://doyonoil.com/Content/pdfs/YukonFlats.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> NPRA IAP EIS pg 346

<sup>20</sup> Alaska Marine Mammal Stock Assessments. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service. 2017.

<sup>21</sup> FWS ITR FR 52304



moving further offshore in the summer to the pack ice<sup>22</sup> and also frequent industrial areas like Pt Thomson, Badami, Prudhoe Bay, Kuparuk, Alpine, and developed areas east in Canada.

As distinguished in the NPRA IAP EIS, polar bears do have a certain degree of fidelity to their denning areas but there is a significant alteration in specific denning sites. Studies show that 46 dens have been documented in the coastal plain over a 40 year period. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) conducted a Forward Looking Infrared Radar (FLIR) survey in the Coastal Plain in the winter of 2018. The preliminary results, according to FWS, were that FWS detected five dens. Of that total, one had been abandoned prior to use, two were confirmed polar bears dens, and two were fox dens. These results provide clear insight into how polar bears are using the Coastal Plain for denning, and gives a degree of confidence on the efficacy of FLIR Surveys as they were successful in identifying even fox dens.

Through Traditional Knowledge, we understand that polar bears and terrestrial mammals like caribou are inherently mobile and their use of their habitat can vary widely. Through the robust mitigation measures established by the North Slope Borough, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management, impacts to polar bears have been negligible from resource development activities for decades. The FWS Incidental Take Regulation have successfully minimized impacts to polar bears from oil and gas activities on and offshore:

“Since 1993, the documented impacts of incidental take by Industry activity in the Beaufort Sea ITR region affected only small numbers of bears, were primarily short-term changes to behavior, and had no long-term impacts on individuals and no impacts on the SBS polar bear population, or the global population.”

While the FWS Beaufort Sea ITR do not include the 1002 Area, the monitoring and permitting encompasses a much larger geographic area, manages the same stock of polar bears, and oversees a larger industry footprint than what is allowed under the 2,000 acre limit set by Congress.

## **Potential for Local Energy**

Future leasing and subsequent activities could benefit the local community of Kaktovik directly. Specifically, local energy development is a potential outcome of prospective leasing and development. In Utqiagvik, the discovery of natural gas resource near the community led to natural gas being available and affordable to its residents, despite being uneconomical for industry to pursue. The community of Nuiqsut also benefits from natural gas as an outcome of development at Alpine. As seen with Nuiqsut and Utqiagvik, local natural gas can significantly offset high fuel costs and is a meaningful, long term benefit to the local people and environment.

## **Land Issues**

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<sup>22</sup> The Use of Sea Ice Habitat by Female Polar Bears in the Beaufort Sea. OCS Study, U.S. Geological Survey, Alaska Science Center, Anchorage, AK. 2004.

Since ANILCA, the Kaktovikmiut have been limited in their access to their Native allotments, traditional subsistence areas, campsites, and generally throughout the Coastal Plain and greater ANWR. Residents of Kaktovik are restricted to traverse the 1002 Area only in the winter time and cannot utilize All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) to access their allotments within or outside of the 1002 Area. These limitations are culturally insensitive and go against the nomadic lifestyle of the Kaktovikmiut. Ironically, potential roads to facilitate development may dramatically increase the local people's access to the Coastal Plain and help create throughways subsistence users can use year-round.

The prolific resource discovered in the 1002 Area is in a region that has demonstrated environmental stewardship, cultural preservation and growth, and a vibrant oil and gas industry can and do co-exist. The precedent setting efforts by Alaska Natives, industry, and agencies to reduce the environmental footprint of development, promote technical advancements, and install mitigation measures to protect wildlife, subsistence, and the environment have changed the nature and scope of resource development on the North Slope and the world. Although the 1002 Area has been off limits to resource development activities since the 1980s, development occurs adjacent to the Coastal Plain in both Alaska and in nearby Canada. The Point Thomson facility is mere miles away from the 1002 Area.

### **History of Development**

Alaska Natives have worked tirelessly to shape development in our region and the same tools we have put in place in Prudhoe Bay, Alpine, Kuparuk, Point Thomson, and offshore will be incorporated into any future activity in the 1002 Area. We emphasize this long history to showcase not only the pivotal role Alaska Natives have played in setting the standards for responsible development in our region, but to stress that resource development activities in the 1002 Area will not occur haphazardly, but will be the outcome of decades of diligence to reduce the environmental footprint, preserve our Iñupiat culture, and to secure a benefit in local development for the local people. While to some, development in the Arctic may be a novel concept, it is not to the people who live here.

Carefully designed mitigation measures by Alaska Natives, industry, and the NSB, which are incorporated into resource development in our region can be credited for the negligible impact that development has had on our environment and traditional ways of life. Through the use of science and Traditional Knowledge, best practices have been implemented to reduce or avoid impacts such as: adequate pipeline height to not impede migrating caribou; sufficient distance between pipeline and road to avoid deterring crossing caribou; specifications on road height and slope; thoughtful design on road placement to avoid funneling migrating caribou; aircraft altitude guidelines; time-of-closures; and other restrictions on operations. These safeguards have worked to protect caribou across the North Slope and we are confident that through coordination with the people of Kaktovik, these mechanisms can be successfully applied to oil and gas programs the coastal plain.

March 20, 2019

**Congressman Jared Huffman**  
**1527 Longworth House Office Building**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

RE: H.R. 1146 – Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act

Representative Huffman,

Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE) strongly opposes H.R. 1146 amending Public Law 115-97 to repeal the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) oil and gas leasing program. Beyond the fact that your bill would repeal an opportunity that the Iñupiat people have fought for decades to achieve, we are struck by the lack of knowledge displayed in this legislation, which completely ignores the existence of the Iñupiat people, and especially the people of Kaktovik. The Native Village of Kaktovik is a federally recognized tribe and the Kaktovikmiut have occupied the Coastal Plain for at least 11,000 years.

The Coastal Plain is home to more than just caribou and none of the Coastal Plain is wilderness. It is not a place without people; it never has been – it has been continuously occupied by the Iñupiat people and our ancestors for millennia, and we find it insulting that you fail to acknowledge this history. Currently, the Coastal Plain is the home of a community of over 200 people. People who live, hunt, fish, raise their families, and hope for a secure economic future for their children. People who walk in the footsteps of their ancestors all over the land that Congress, without our permission, designated as the 1002 Area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. People that you have completely disregarded because they generally do not agree with you. In light of this, Congressman, your concern about human rights seems a bit pale.

When we, Indigenous peoples, use terms like self-determination, sovereignty, economic equality, cultural survival, and traditional lands, they are more than just buzzwords. These are objectives that have long been denied us and for which we have had to fight for generations. It is not for you to ignore those ideas, nor the people fighting for them, in favor of those who are more aligned with your political agenda. To us, this issue goes beyond politics to the very sustainability of our communities, culture, and economy.

The Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act undermines the wishes of those of us living closest to ANWR and negates years of work by local stakeholders toward ensuring a sustainable economy for the people and communities of our region. We hope this letter might help you better understand the realities of life in the Arctic. H.R. 1146 preaches a “moral responsibility to protect this wilderness heritage as an enduring resource to bequeath undisturbed to future generations of Americans”, but fails to acknowledge the basic needs of future generations of Arctic Iñupiat. Our regional

Arctic Slope Native Association City of Anaktuvuk Pass City of Point Hope Native Village of Atqasuk Olgoonik Corporation

Arctic Slope Regional Corporation City of Atqasuk City of Wainwright Native Village of Point Lay Tikigaq Corporation

Atqasuk Corporation City of Utqiagvik Iłisaġvik College North Slope Borough Ukpeaġvik Iñupiat Corporation

Native Village of Kaktovik Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation Nunamiut Corporation Native Village of Point Hope Wainwright Tribal Council

government, the North Slope Borough (NSB), is responsible for more territory than any other local government in the nation. The NSB receives over 96% of its revenue from property taxes levied on industry infrastructure on the North Slope, which enables them to provide services that were never accessible before in the Arctic. The Borough School District provides vocational and academic education for people of all ages; NSB health clinics provide modern medical services to residents in even the smallest and most remote of villages. The Municipal Services Department operates water, sewage, and electric utilities, plows roads and runways, and maintains landfills. Other NSB departments provide housing, police and fire protection, search and rescue, and other critical services to our communities. Altogether, the NSB is the single largest local employer on the North Slope, employing over 63% of the workforce. These benefits of modern American civilization, common in the rest of the nation, have been built on the foundation of the North Slope oil industry.

It is hypocritical of you, Congressman, to stifle the efforts of Kaktovik to secure jobs, a local economy, and income for their community while your state makes billions of dollars off the development of its own oil and gas resources. If you are concerned about the impacts of resource development, we suggest that you focus on your own state of California, which despite its green image, produces the dirtiest crude in America and has some of the largest refineries on the West Coast, which in addition to refining much cleaner Alaska North Slope Crude, also imports and refines oil from foreign countries like Saudi Arabia and Angola. The message this bill sends is that you prioritize the leisure whims of your California constituents above the needs of the Native people of Kaktovik.

H.R. 1146 cites climate change as one of the main drivers of the bill. In reality, climate change – and the world’s response to it – add additional layers to existing burdens that we, the Arctic’s Indigenous people, are facing. We agree that climate change has deeply affected our traditional Iñupiat ways of life. We do not agree that the solution to that problem is to create more wilderness that hinders our ability to provide for our people and respond to the impacts that we are facing. It is unfair for you to ask that we, as Indigenous peoples, carry the burden of climate change *and* the burden of mitigation so that you can fly back and forth to your home district with an easy conscience.

Even with the services our local government provides, many of the people in the Arctic live in conditions that fall below acceptable standards of living, despite being citizens of one of the richest countries in the world. We are concerned and puzzled, then, by your focus on protecting eco-tourism and this idea of pristine, unspoiled wilderness – at the expense of an economy to sustain our children – that rich elites across America “cherish.” While we are certainly used to this harmful narrative by now, it does not seem in line with your democratic values. For our part, we do not see any contradiction between developing our resources and *at the same time* protecting our environment and wildlife. These are not diverging priorities but an integral piece to balance in the Arctic.

The bill as introduced further ignores the historical and cultural trauma that is a part of this land and the Kaktovikmiut who inhabit it. The people of Kaktovik, in recent memory, have suffered through three forced relocations at the hands of the American military. Then, in 1980, the federal government took 23 million acres of land – without consent, consultation, nor a treaty between parties – and gave the people of Kaktovik back 92,000 acres of land immediately surrounding their village. A mere fraction of their traditional and ancestral lands. The “deal” was that this land was locked up, the Kaktovikmiut were unable to access Native allotments, cultural sites, and subsistence areas in the newly expanded Refuge in the summer months. No, they now live with extreme restrictions on how they can use their own lands as a result of the changes made by the federal government in how the land is designated, lands that the Iñupiat people have been stewards over for thousands of years. Do you consider these human rights violations, Representative Huffman? We hope, at the very least, that this does not diminish “the integrity of the National Wildlife Refuge System,” which in itself operates on the mistaken Western idea that Indigenous peoples are incompetent at managing their own lands.

The views of the Iñupiat who call ANWR home are frequently ignored, and your bill reinforces the perception that the wishes of people who live in and around the Coastal Plain are less important than those who live hundreds and thousands of miles away. Mr. Huffman, you do not have to tell the Iñupiat people, who have lived on this land for generations, the importance of our homelands – we see it, we know it, we depend on it, we are a part of it. We have something very important in common, that often gets lost in this debate – this false dichotomy of “for” vs. “against”, republican vs. democrat, economy vs. environment – we all share a commitment to protecting this land and we would welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with you and the Gwich’in people, to whom we have extended many invitations for discussion, to protect this balance between responsible development and environmental protections that is integral to our way of life and the long-term sustainability of our culture.

The Iñupiat people have existed, and even flourished, in one of the most severe climates in the world for generations. We understand the balance needed to sustain our way of life and our communities; this priority is currently dependent on successful and safe oil and gas developments. We are confident that the health of the Porcupine Caribou Herd can be maintained given our success in maintaining the health of three other caribou herds that migrate within our region. We respectfully request that you remove your bill from consideration and come visit our communities to better understand the needs of our people and our communities. We would welcome the opportunity.

Taikuu,



Sayers Tuzroyluk,  
President, Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat

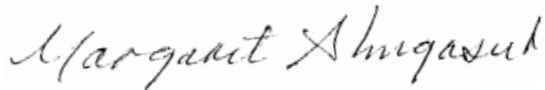
Arctic Slope Native Association City of Anaktuvuk Pass City of Point Hope Native Village of Atqasuk Olgoonik Corporation  
Arctic Slope Regional Corporation City of Atqasuk City of Wainwright Native Village of Point Lay Tikigaq Corporation  
Atqasuk Corporation City of Utqiagvik Iñisaġvik College North Slope Borough Ukpeaġvik Iñupiat Corporation  
Native Village of Kaktovik Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation Nunamiut Corporation Native Village of Point Hope Wainwright Tribal Council



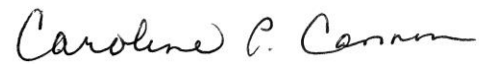
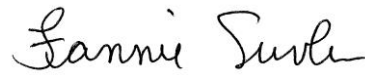
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John Hopson Jr.  
Vice Chairman



Hugh G. PATKOTAK Sa



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**Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE) is a 501(c)4 nonprofit organization established to provide direct input from the Iñupiat people in matters of Arctic policy. VOICE's membership includes 20 of the 28 entities from across Arctic Alaska including tribal councils, municipal governments, Alaska Native corporations, Alaska village corporations, educational institutions and other regional entities.**

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