



January 26, 2022

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
U.S. House of Representatives
1511 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Grijalva,

It has come to our attention that you are considering sending a letter to Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland opposing the Willow Project, a project located in our region of Alaska. In your position as Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, a committee that has jurisdiction on issues related to the Indigenous Peoples of the United States, we respectfully request that you meet with and listen to the indigenous people of the North Slope of Alaska before you take a position on the Willow Project.

The Iñupiat of the North Slope have lived in the Arctic for over 10,000 years. We are proud of our self-determination efforts to ensure future generations of Iñupiat continue to reside in our communities and have access to essential services. Without a stable economy, our communities will suffer and so too will our ability to engage in Iñupiat cultural traditions, including a subsistence way of life.

The North Slope of Alaska spans an area nearly the size of the state of Minnesota and within that expansive area, there are eight Iñupiat communities - Anaktuvuk Pass, Atkasuk, Kaktovik, Nuiqsut, Point Hope, Point Lay, Utqiagvik and Wainwright. None of our communities are accessible by road; all supplies must be flown or barged in making the cost of living extremely high, and economic opportunity generally low. Our North Slope residents are keenly aware that advances in our communities – running water, local schools, health care, public safety, electricity, and more have come as a result of the coordination and cooperation of Alaska Native leaders and entities across the region.

As you know, fifty years ago, the Federal Government directed Alaska Native people to organize in a new structure of indigenous representation. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, commonly referred to as ANCSA, was a dramatically different approach by the Federal Government to Federal Indian policy. Unlike the Lower 48 model of indigenous representation that typically has a central entity on the reservation, the Tribe, that administers the delivery of services like healthcare, public safety, education, land management and economic development to name a few, the passage of ANCSA created a fragmented system of Alaska Native representation and delivery of services.

Our region has a multitude of Alaska Native entities that work together to effectively serve, provide for and enrich the lives of the Iñupiat people we represent. Our three entities, the

Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope (ICAS), the North Slope Borough (Borough) and Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC) are three of those entities. While our roles are defined, our constituencies overlap which is why we work closely together to protect the cultural and economic interests of the North Slope Iñupiat.

Established in 1971, the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope is a federally recognized regional tribal government for the North Slope and represents over 13,000 Iñupiat tribal members. The mission of ICAS is to exercise its sovereign rights and powers for the benefit of tribal members, to conserve and retain tribal lands and resources including subsistence and environmental issues, to establish and carry out justice systems including social services under Iñupiat tribal law and custom, and to increase the variety and quality of services provided to current tribal members and for our future generations.

The North Slope Borough is a home rule government located above the Arctic Circle that represents the roughly 10,000 residents in the eight communities of the region. The Borough's jurisdiction includes the entire National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska (NPR-A) and the villages within it—Nuiqsut, Atkasuk, Utqiagvik, and Wainwright. In 1972, the Iñupiat people of the North Slope formed the Borough to ensure our communities would benefit from oil and gas development on their ancestral homelands. It was the first time Native Americans took control of their destiny through the use of a municipal government. The Borough exercises its powers of taxation, property assessment, education, and planning and zoning services. Taxes levied on oil and gas infrastructure have enabled the Borough to invest in public infrastructure and utilities, support education, and provide police, fire, emergency and other services. Elsewhere in rural Alaska, these services are typically provided by the state or federal governments.

Arctic Slope Regional Corporation was incorporated pursuant to the passage of ANCSA. ASRC is owned by and represents the business interests of our approximately 13,000 Iñupiat shareholders, many of whom reside in the eight communities on the North Slope. ANCSA extinguished aboriginal land title and conveyed nearly five million acres of fee-simple land to ASRC for the cultural and economic benefit of our Iñupiat shareholders. Mandated by Congress to not only operate as a for-profit corporation but to serve the social and welfare interests of the people it represents, ASRC is committed to providing financial returns to our Iñupiat shareholders in the form of jobs and dividends, and to preserving Iñupiat culture and traditions.

Over the decades, and even more so today, we have seen national environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) attempt to wear the mantle of protectors of Indigenous interests in the U.S. Arctic -- something that we, as elected and appointed leaders of the Iñupiat people of the North Slope, find unacceptable. ENGO's continue to push a false narrative to advance their agendas at the expense of the Indigenous people and communities of the North Slope.

To fully embrace the Biden Administration's priorities of racial equity, environmental justice and supporting underserved communities, leaders must take the time to listen to

those they are aiming to serve, even if their perspective may not fit the political narrative being pushed on a national level.

We understand that your proposed letter not only requests Secretary Haaland oppose the Willow Project, but it calls for terminating the project in order to protect the resources that support Indigenous communities. The Administration cannot proclaim to support meaningful tribal consultation and environmental justice while at the same time killing a critical resource that supports our regional economy and the Iñupiat communities of the North Slope region. If the contents of your proposed letter are true, this would be highly offensive to our region's leadership.

ICAS, the Borough and ASRC support the development of the Willow Project. Our region has a fifty-year relationship with the oil and gas industry, which came as a result of the Federal Government's desire to develop oil and gas resources on our ancestral homelands. While initially wary of any development on our lands, through open communication and transparency in planning and Iñupiat ingenuity, our relationship with the oil and gas industry has turned into a partnership. A partnership that has brought significant economic benefits to the region that would have otherwise been absent. The entities that represent the North Slope Iñupiat play an active role in oil and gas development projects that take place in our region. Our region has shown that responsible development and the continuation of our Iñupiat cultural traditions, including subsistence activities, can effectively coexist while also providing the means to deliver modern-day essential services such as police and fire protection, pre-K-12 education and water and sewer infrastructure (which again, are largely made possible through responsible development of oil and gas resources on our lands).

If you are truly concerned about curbing oil and gas development, examine the massive imports of Russian oil coming into the West Coast of the United States and also ask why the Biden Administration has recently called for OPEC to produce more overseas developed oil to stave off Russian aggression in Ukraine. None of these countries have the same stringent rules and regulations imposed on oil and gas companies that operate in the US, including in our region of Alaska. The North Slope region has developed our oil and gas resources safely and for the direct benefit of our Iñupiat community and the nation.

We would be grateful and honored to have the opportunity to meet with you on this topic and ask that you consider meeting with us before sending a letter that does not align with the interests of the Iñupiat of the North Slope of Alaska.

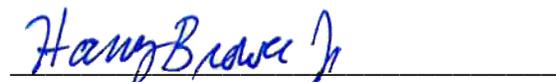
If there are any questions we can answer for you or your staff, or to schedule a time to meet please contact Bridget Anderson, ASRC's Vice President External Affairs at banderson@asrc.com or 907-339-6066.

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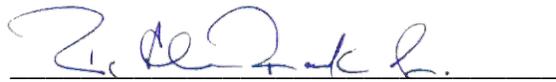
Sincerely,



George Edwardson
President
Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope



Harry K. Brower, Jr.
Mayor
North Slope Borough



Rex A. Rock, Sr.
President and CEO
Arctic Slope Regional Corporation

Cc: Congressman Don Young