

**Testimony of Matthew Rexford  
Tribal Administrator, Native Village of Kaktovik  
November 2, 2017**

**Before the  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate**

Chairman Murkowski, Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to speak to you today.

My name is Matthew Rexford and I serve as Tribal Administrator for the Native Village of Kaktovik (NVK), I am also President of Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation (KIC). Both NVK and KIC serve as members of the Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE) along with 18 other North Slope entities.

I was raised and live in Kaktovik, Alaska, located inside the 1002 area of ANWR. All of the organizations I previously mentioned – NVK, KIC and VOICE – support oil and gas development there.

Kaktovik is located 280 miles southeast of Utqiagvik (formerly Barrow) and 90 miles west of the Canadian border. Our village borders the Beaufort Sea and is situated on the coast of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR).

Approximately 92,000 acres of surface lands in and around the community are owned by the Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation - our Village Corporation, established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. These lands are within and are then surrounded by ANWR – so we are an island in the middle of the largest wildlife refuge in America. Spanning more than 19 million acres, ANWR's lands cover an area larger than 10 U.S. states.

This vast expanse is home to caribou, fox, bears and other species. **Much of that land is also home to the Iñupiat, and our people have used the resources it has blessed us with for more than 10,000 years.** One of those natural resources lies beneath this great land — oil and gas, and lots of it.

The residents of Kaktovik and their ancestors are the indigenous inhabitants of the region. They rely on the bounty of the land and find sustenance within ANWR. The bowhead whale, caribou, Dall sheep, muskoxen and the fish of the region are a vital food source to the Kaktovikmiut.

The debate over opening ANWR to drilling gained national attention in 1980, when the Congress set aside less than 8 percent of the refuge for potential oil and gas development. This section of ANWR became known as the 1002 area, after Section 1002 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. This is the home of the Kaktovikmiut.

Since then, we have fought unsuccessfully to open the 1002 area to drilling, which literally requires an act of Congress. At the same time, some Lower 48 lawmakers and special interest groups across the country have waged war on the idea, citing the disruption of wildlife and the pristine Arctic environment.

**The Arctic Iñupiat will not become conservation refugees.** We do not approve of efforts to turn our homeland into one giant national park, which literally guarantees us a fate with no economy, no jobs, reduced subsistence and no hope for the future of our people. We are already being impacted by restrictions of access to the federal lands for subsistence purposes – this is really disturbing to us since we have lived here long before there ever was a refuge designated.

As ANWR debates occur, the views of the Iñupiat who call the area home are oftentimes left out. The wishes of the people who live in and around the refuge's coastal plain frequently are drowned out. In fact, that was why VOICE was established in 2015 because our people were tired of others – **outsiders who live thousands of miles away – speaking on our behalf** and driving Arctic policy decisions that directly affect us and our communities. **ANWR is a perfect example.**

**My fellow Iñupiat and I firmly believe in a social license to operate,** and perhaps no other potential project in the history of America has called for

such a blessing from local indigenous peoples more than this one. Attempts to permanently block development in the 1002 – an area intentionally **NOT** designated as wilderness because of its oil and gas potential – **is a slap in the face to our region and its people. It’s exactly the same as saying “it’s okay for everyone else in this country to have a THRIVING economy, but you can’t have one at all.**

Have you ever heard of Prudhoe Bay? When oil was first discovered on our land in 1969, the Iñupiat were worried of industry activities and fought hard for self-determination to protect our subsistence resources. So we fully understand the trepidation from outsiders: the fear that the presence of industry on the coastal plain of ANWR could disrupt wildlife and **affect America’s manufactured perspective of our land and culture.**

We Iñupiat have the benefit of decades of experience working with the oil and gas industry to implement stringent regulations to protect our lands through best management practices and the industry consistently has lived up to our standards. We know development in ANWR can be done safely, because it’s already being done safely all over the Arctic. Sixty miles away is the largest oil field on the continent, and the wildlife, including caribou, have successfully cohabitated with industry for forty years.

The oil and gas industry supports our communities by providing jobs, business opportunities and infrastructure investments, has built our schools, hospitals, **and has moved our people away from third-world living conditions – we refuse to go backward in time.** It has provided other basic services most Americans may take for granted. Our region recognizes its importance to our local and state economy, and we believe that development can be done responsibly in a portion of the 1002 area. We are not alone.

As Iñupiat, we stand to be unarguably the most affected by oil and gas activity in the Arctic. Therefore, we have the greatest stake in seeing that any and all development keeps our land and subsistence resources safe. We know it can be done, because it’s being done.

We think that now is the time to open ANWR to **MEASURED** exploration and development for the benefit of our community and all of Alaska.

THANK YOU.