

For Immediate Release

## North Slope leaders react to Biden's executive orders

January 27, 2021

**Point Hope, AK** – President Joe Biden has issued a flurry of executive orders that will have considerable economic impacts on the indigenous people of the North Slope of Alaska. His moratorium on oil and gas activity in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) has eliminated economic development opportunities for the only private landowner in the Refuge – Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation. That, along with the 60-day ban on federal permits, which is already preventing work in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, will have a significant effect on jobs and the economy of our region.

In the days before and since taking office, President Biden promised to unify the country. Then, in his first order of business, promptly alienated Alaska and other states that rely on energy development to keep the lights on in their communities. While Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE) applauds the concept of unity, accomplishing it means working together. What we're seeing instead are outside influences making decisions for our state and region without any consultation. This is precisely the type of unilateral approach to policy that VOICE was created to challenge.

"These actions hinder Alaska's growth and potential, and significantly hamstring the sustainability of our North Slope communities. Since oil was discovered in our region 50 years ago we have had to balance our cultural and subsistence needs against the economic realities of modern life. Our region and state has a singular economy in resource development – primarily oil and gas – and we entertain opportunities with the industry because nobody else is providing them," said VOICE President Sayers Tuzroyluk. "We are eager to hear the Biden administration's plan to replace the economy that it's brought to a standstill, and look forward to working side-by-side with the President to create new, sustainable solutions for our region."

"I grew up having to find fuel to keep warm and hunt to feed my family. Our people struggled to survive if the animals didn't come our way. Only recently have we been exposed to first-world conveniences. Our children and grandchildren have grown up with the internet, schools in our communities and running water – this is a different life from mine," said Rex A. Rock Sr., VOICE Chairman of the Board. "We cannot turn back the clock. We formed a home rule government to tax resource development in our region to provide for our communities and create a modern life for our people. We strive for unity and want to work with the Biden administration to continue to achieve that."

"When it comes to ANWR we're talking about policies based on environmental single-mindedness. They might sound good sitting in D.C., Seattle or New York, but what we're dealing with locally and regionally is the federal government preventing Alaska Natives who live inside the Refuge from managing their own lands," said Matthew Rexford of Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation. "Unfortunately, Biden's promise to grow the economy for all Americans was made without due consideration for residents of the Arctic, and certainly without input from the

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 Iñupiat College North Slope Borough Ukpeaġvik Iñupiat Corporation

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

Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope Native Village of Barrow North Slope Borough School District City of Kaktovik

residents of Kaktovik, Alaska. This is a fundamental human rights issue – we have the right to develop our lands but are being prevented from doing so.”

VOICE recognizes that oil and gas will play a less prominent role in powering America’s next generation, but a conversion to more renewable energy sources will take time. There will be continued demand for traditional energy development in the decades to come and Alaska can meet the country’s needs for the foreseeable future.

“We’re not climate change deniers. We have lived in the Arctic for thousands of years and have witnessed first-hand its effects on coastal erosion, melting sea ice and subsistence resources. We’ve worked hard to balance the health of our environment and culture with the survival of our people and communities, and we’ll continue to do so,” said North Slope Borough Mayor Harry K. Brower. “Shutting down the industry that supports virtually everything in our region – especially as we struggle with the effects of a global pandemic – will have very real, negative consequences for the indigenous people, and all residents, of the North Slope.”

“Since the advent of oil and gas on Alaska’s North Slope, and our taxing authority, we have built first-world amenities such as clean water, flushing toilets and affordable power in our remote communities. Studies show these improvements have increased the life-span of our residents by an average of 13 years. We understand that this is a compromise, but we have been walking that balance for over forty years and we can continue to do so,” said George Edwardsen, President of the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope. “It’s our responsibility to preserve the sovereign rights and powers of Alaska Native tribes, and so we must work with the President to ensure our voices are heard and respected.”

### **About Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat**

*Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE) is a 501(c)4 nonprofit organization established to provide direct input from the people of the North Slope in matters of Arctic policy. VOICE’s membership includes 24 entities from across the North Slope including tribal councils, municipal governments, Alaska Native corporations, Alaska village corporations, educational institutions and other regional entities.*