

February 3, 2022

North Slope Borough residents,

Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE) was established in 2015 with the purpose of bringing North Slope leadership together in order to chart a path forward for our region. By unifying our people, we empower our communities, our region, our state and country to make sound decisions that directly affect us. VOICE works with its 24 members to improve the lives of people and their communities through advocacy and engagement at the local, state and national level. It operates off the core belief that local people should have the greatest say in issues that affect them.

The overarching mission of the organization is to address the needs of our people and ensure the economic and cultural sustainability of our communities. Since its formation, VOICE has listened to the challenges and aspirations brought forth by its member communities and pursued countless efforts to address and pursue them. The year 2021 was a busy year, and we would like to highlight a few of the issues we have engaged in on behalf of you – the residents of the North Slope.

VOICE ELECTS NEW PRESIDENT

In 2021, VOICE proudly welcomed John Hopson Jr. as its new President. Hopson has been actively involved with the organization since its inception, representing the City of Wainwright on the VOICE board of directors while serving as its Vice-Chairman. His deep understanding of the region, its people and the unique issues important to each of our individual member communities makes Hopson an ideal person to lead VOICE into the future.

Hopson replaces outgoing President Sayers Tuzroyluk Sr. from Point Hope, who retired in March after serving the board for more than five years. VOICE would like to thank Mr. Tuzroyluk for his dedication and commitment to improving the lives of North Slope residents, and for the tremendous growth of the organization under his tenure. Taikuu!

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

With a new year comes new challenges. In 2021, Americans elected a new President of the United States, whose climate action agenda had immediate and disproportionate impacts on the economic future of the North Slope. Within days of taking office, President Biden issued a moratorium on all activity within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) and ordered a ban on federal oil and gas permits, which prevented ongoing work in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A).

As an organization established, in part, to promote an understanding of the North Slope economy and encourage culturally responsible economic development, VOICE took action to ensure that local input was heard and considered. We engaged with the Biden administration, Congress, the U.S. Senate and federal agencies to educate about the role resource development plays in our region and the rights our members have to manage their land and resources. We communicated the reversal of progress toward fulfilling federal obligations to Alaska Natives; urged tribal consultation on issues affecting our member communities; and pointed out the barriers to equal opportunity faced by our underserved communities as a result of government policies.

VOICE will continue to travel to Washington D.C. to meet with lawmakers, testify at public hearings and work closely with the Alaska delegation to ensure local voices are heard and respected on issues affecting the economic future of the region.

STATE OF ALASKA PARTNERSHIP

Life changing decisions about the Arctic are being made in Washington D.C. by people who have never set foot here. Many of these decisions are occurring without consultation or respect to the rights or wishes of Iñupiat people and have far reaching impacts not only for the region, but across Alaska.

In January 2021, VOICE passed a resolution to work collaboratively with the Governor's office on projects concerning the economic and cultural sustainability of the North Slope. Recognizing that a strong, stable North Slope economy is good for the region and also the state, the joint effort aims to advance issues critical to the North Slope's traditional and economic well-being at the federal level.

Self-determination is a critical right of Alaska Native people, and VOICE is proud to work with Governor Dunleavy in fighting for those rights and helping to preserve the future of the North Slope and its people.

NORTH SLOPE GRANTS

Last year, VOICE created a grant program in order to serve its members and bring benefits to the region. As part of the program, it conducted ongoing research and collected information on funding opportunities available to North Slope entities. The results of this research were released through weekly Grant Opportunity Reports to members. From COVID-19 relief and public safety to housing improvements and transportation, the grant program has resulted in a comprehensive and growing list of funding available through the state and federal governments. VOICE also provides members with assistance in navigating grant guidelines, compliance requirements and completing grant applications.

In October 2021, VOICE received approval from the IRS on establishing its 501(c)3 branch of the organization, allowing it to seek federal funding for social programs and educational endeavors identified as critical to our member

communities. In 2022 and beyond, we look forward to positively impacting the region through this new arm of our organization.

VOICE SUMMIT SERIES

As part of its focus on North Slope unity and speaking as one, VOICE worked diligently throughout 2021 toward the concept of an Arctic-specific conference to provide an open forum for discussions around critical issues facing our communities. The vision for the VOICE Summit is to share information on important topics; develop an inclusive and unified path forward for the future of the region; and discuss policy changes that meet local and regional needs.

While COVID-19 measures prevented an in-person conference last year, VOICE was proud to host a virtual Summit Series on October 26th and 27th – bringing together North Slope leaders and residents for a 2-day workshop focused on state and federal grant opportunities.

This year, VOICE plans to host its first in-person Summit that will include collaborative discussions on the North Slope economy; energy and climate change; community resilience; housing and infrastructure; subsistence; and government policy. An annual event that will take place each October during AFN, the VOICE Summit will help our board direct its attention and efforts toward advocacy and engagement on issues most critical to our members and our wider North Slope family.

RURAL BROADBAND

A lack of affordable, high-speed internet available to North Slope communities continues to hinder the quality of education for children, access to timely medical services for residents and the sustainability of local businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the importance of Arctic broadband as remote learning, telemedicine and e-commerce capabilities have become a necessity. As many of you know, VOICE has worked hard over the past several years to correct the connectivity discrepancies between urban and rural areas, and 2021 was no exception.

Last year, VOICE participated in broadband seminars to gather and communicate information about federal programs and funding opportunities to bridge the digital divide. We partnered with Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope (ICAS) to conduct connectivity surveys across the region to measure existing broadband capabilities and future needs. The results will be used to inform grant applications and identify potential internet expansion projects in the region. VOICE also communicated regularly with the State of Alaska Broadband Taskforce to assist in identifying broadband needs in our rural villages, and used its regional connectivity surveys to produce a broadband report for the Governor's office.

Finally, in conjunction with ICAS through our joint Arctic Broadband Initiative, VOICE hosted a workshop with internet providers. The program brought end-user stakeholders together with broadband service providers to identify needs, improvement opportunities and potential infrastructure funding sources to improve connectivity to our villages.

OUR VOICE. OUR VISION.

Being an advocate and local information center for the region regarding developments in the Arctic has always been a foundation of our organization. As a conduit for communication amongst and between our eight communities – and with government and nongovernment organizations – VOICE exists to keep you informed and carry regional priorities to decision makers.

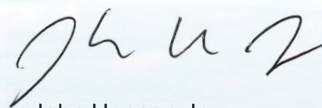
Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat continues to be inspired and empowered by its members to address the evolving needs of our region. In 2021, we undertook countless initiatives to promote a healthy, sustainable and thriving Arctic, and to ensure North Slope voices were not marginalized by politicians and outside interests. It's been a busy year, and we have worked hard to represent our membership – and the region as a whole – by making meaningful contributions to issues and programs that have the potential to impact our communities.

In 2021, VOICE worked with the National Security Council to update its National Arctic Strategy to ensure the needs of our region were identified and accounted for. We joined the Clean Hydrogen Futures Coalition – a group advocating for clean hydrogen as a critical pathway to eventual global decarbonization. VOICE worked with the state in support of the Arctic Strategic Transportation and Resources (ASTAR) program, and continued its work with the Alaska Air Carrier's Association to improve freight and mail service to the Slope. We also met routinely with Senator Murkowski, Senator Sullivan, Congressman Young and federal agencies throughout the year on issues related to economic development, subsistence rights, tribal consultation, oil and gas development, and much more.

Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat believes that local people should be fully integrated into decisions which affect our region, our culture and the economic longevity of our communities. By bringing together a diverse group of organizations that share common responsibilities and a unified purpose, we have the ability to change our future forever. We would like to thank the VOICE board of directors, and so many of you who continue to participate in making the North Slope a better place to live, work, learn and subsist.

Quyasugtigli nuttaaqq ukkiuq – Happy New Year!

Quyanaqpak,



John Hopson Jr.
President, Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat

