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The North Slope Applauds AIDEA Lawsuit and Urges Federal Policymakers to Consult Local Indigenous Communities Before Announcing Policies Affecting Their People

Washington's decision to cancel ANWR leases is an injustice to the North Slope Iñupiat

October 20, 2023, Utqiagvik, A.K. — This week, the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) [filed a lawsuit](#) in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia against the Biden administration over its September 6th decision to [rescind](#) seven oil and gas leases in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). The administration's decision, which was made without consulting Alaska Native communities, is a great injustice to the North Slope communities within and on the perimeter of ANWR. It furthermore violates the [2017 Tax Act](#), which included a clear mandate to open the 1002 area of ANWR, an area only 0.01% of its total land, to responsible resource development projects. The decision and its unilateral development continues the Biden administration's troubling pattern of inconsistent policymaking that prioritizes its own agenda over the rights of Alaska Native communities.

These communities were blindsided by the administration's announcement to rescind leases in the ANWR, with many North Slope tribal leaders learning about the decision through the press. The residents of Kaktovik, the North Slope city located directly in ANWR and the 1002 area, were given no notice to the decision despite its outsized impact on their ancestral homelands. To add insult to injury, the administration then [hastily planned](#) a community "meeting" to discuss its 1400-page Coastal Plain Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) in the midst of our fall subsistence activities and with only two business days' notice. Only seven community members were able to attend.

"This is no way to treat Alaska Native communities," said **Nagruk Harcharek, President of the Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat**. "This administration has yet to live up to its [repeated promises](#) to listen to and work with Indigenous communities who overwhelmingly support resource development projects in our region. Rather than producing energy under robust American environmental protections on the North Slope, the Biden administration chooses instead to [ease sanctions](#) in

Venezuela's oil sector, making concessions to foreign dictators and countries with shoddy environmental track records to meet America's energy needs."

"Our communities and elected officials on the North Slope have been steadfast in our support of responsible development on our ancestral homelands," said **North Slope Borough Mayor Josiah Patkotak**. "They are a critical component of our region's economy and the long-term health of our Iñupiat culture. Yet the federal government's inconsistent policy making continues to complicate our economic security, ability to practice subsistence traditions, and expand modern infrastructure and amenities to our communities, many of which are only one generation removed from third-world conditions unrecognizable to the lower 48."

The North Slope welcomes AIDEA's efforts to seek justice and hopes that the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia respects the legality of their contracts and, by extension, the North Slope Iñupiat's right to self-determination.

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About Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat

[Voice of Arctic Iñupiat](#) (VOICE) is a nonprofit organization established in 2015 by the region's collective elected Iñupiat leadership to speak with a unified voice on issues impacting the North Slope Iñupiat, their communities, their economy, and their culture. Its members include local governments, Alaska Native Corporations, federally recognized tribes, and tribal non-profits across the North Slope of Alaska. In 2017, VOICE's board passed a resolution in support of opening of the 1002 Area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to oil and gas exploration and development.

About the North Slope Borough

[The Borough](#) is the regional municipal government for the northernmost region of Alaska and the largest municipality in the United States by size. The Borough's jurisdiction encompasses the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. Approximately three-quarters of the Borough's nearly 10,000 residents are Iñupiat.