



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VOICE Concludes North Slope Delegation D.C. Fly-In, Disappointed with Interior Department's Insincere NPR-A Rule Comment Extension

VOICE and a delegation of elected North Slope Iñupiat leaders met with numerous federal officials last week, but, once again, noticeably absent was Interior Secretary Deb Haaland

ANCHORAGE, AK – On the heels of unprecedented actions taken by the Department of the Interior, Nagruk Harcharek, President of [Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat \(VOICE\)](#), joined a delegation of elected North Slope Iñupiat leaders for a critical visit to Washington, D.C. last week to meet with congressional and federal policymakers to demand meaningful engagement and consultation on issues impacting the region. The visit included face-to-face meetings with sub-cabinet officials at the White House, Office of Management and Budget, and Interior Department, while no answers were provided regarding process or ownership of decision-making within the administration.

Just days after the trip's conclusion, the Interior Department now claims to be acting in response to our requests — but this could not be further from the truth. Today, the Interior Department [announced](#) that it would extend the public comment period for its proposed National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) Rule by only 30 days, totaling just one-third of the North Slope region's consistent request for a 90-day extension. Much like Interior Department Secretary Deb Haaland's decision not to meet with the delegation last week, instead deputizing her role to the non-Senate-confirmed Acting Deputy Secretary, the extension falls far short of what was formally requested by elected North Slope Iñupiat leaders on behalf of their communities.

"Secretary Haaland has continuously offered empty promises, noting the importance of consultation with Indigenous communities, yet blindsiding our region with decisions about our own homelands. She claims that Indigenous voices know their homelands better than anyone else, yet refuses to meet with us," said **Nagruk Harcharek, President of VOICE**. "This latest announcement further alienates and neglects the voices of Alaska Native communities on the North Slope. Secretary Haaland has a long road to walk to heal the relationship damaged by her Interior Department and the White House. We will continue calling on the Secretary to show us the respect we deserve by meeting with us herself as well as ensuring meaningful engagement from all levels of her Department with the Indigenous leadership from our region, on all matters regarding our ancestral homelands."

The Interior Department's announcement exemplifies the lopsided, tone-deaf relationship between the North Slope Iñupiat and Secretary Haaland. To date, the Secretary has denied or ignored eight

meeting requests from VOICE members, including the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope, the region's federally recognized tribe, and other North Slope leadership. Her continued refusals defy White House and Interior [policy memorandums](#) about tribal consultation and raises serious questions about the Secretary's engagement — or lack thereof — with other Indigenous groups when making decisions affecting their lands and people.

During last week's advocacy visit, the members of Alaska's Congressional delegation urged federal policymakers to pursue more consistent and meaningful engagement and consultation with the North Slope Iñupiat. Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK), and Rep. Mary Sattler Peltola (D-AK) joined meetings throughout the week and participated in a [joint press conference](#) on Wednesday to call out the inconsistencies in the federal government's engagement with Indigenous groups.

"Last week, a strong delegation of Alaska North Slope Native leaders traveled a very long way to be in Washington, D.C.," said **Sen. Lisa Murkowski**. "It is really incredible that they have to come thousands of miles and knock on the doors of federal agencies just to try to receive what they should have in Alaska — meaningful consultation about developing natural resources on Iñupiaq lands. I stand with our Alaska Native leaders, who have demanded that this administration listen to and work with the people in the region, even when it's not convenient for their politics."

Last week's visit also saw significant movement in Congress, with Rep. Pete Stauber (R-MI) and Rep. Peltola introducing "[Alaska's Right to Produce Act of 2023](#)," along with a [companion bill](#) introduced by Sens. Sullivan and Murkowski, which would reverse the Interior Department's September decision to rescind leases in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve (ANWR) and severely restrict development in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) — paving the way for future responsible resource development projects.

"Looking ahead, there is still significant work to be done by the federal government to build a respectful relationship with the elected North Slope Iñupiat leadership. Today's disingenuous, insincere announcement shows that the Interior Department still is not willing to meaningfully engage with Indigenous perspectives from our region," said **Nagruk Harcharek**. "We are committed to fighting for our voices and right to self-determination for as long as it takes."

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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 dedicated to preserving and advancing North Slope Iñupiat cultural and economic self-determination. 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.

