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Contact: John Hogan, John@marathonstrategies.com

VOICE Spearheads North Slope Delegation Visit to DC to Fight for Alaska Native Communities' Seat at the Policymaking Table

*Interior Secretary Haaland Must Deliver on Promises for Consultation with Indigenous Communities and
Address Record of Denying Engagement with Alaska Native Leaders*

November 6, 2023, Washington, DC – This week, [Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat](#) (VOICE) President Nagruk Harcharek will join a delegation of elected North Slope Iñupiat leaders in Washington, D.C. to advocate for consistent engagement, including consultation, by the federal government on all matters regarding their people and ancestral homelands.

The visit coincides with Native American Heritage Month and will also mark International Inuit Day on Nov. 7. The delegation's visit follows the Department of the Interior's announcement of [unprecedented actions](#) in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) and the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve (ANWR) on September 6. For thousands of years these lands, including the land within NPR-A and ANWR, have been stewarded by the North Slope Iñupiat, the *only* indigenous group living within the NPR-A and ANWR. Yet these communities were neither consulted by the federal government nor given advance notice of these policies. The federal government has not abided by their legal responsibility to consult with North Slope communities about the impacts of their policy decisions, despite looming public comment deadlines.

"The North Slope Iñupiat deserve to be more than an afterthought by the federal government," said **Nagruk Harcharek**. "It's time for Secretary Haaland and the Biden administration to live up to their promises of engagement by meeting with our elected leadership and including us at the policy table starting now. We are asking for the bare minimum, for simple respect."

The North Slope's elected leadership, including those from its federally recognized tribes, has issued at least eight meeting invitations to Secretary Haaland, including a request while she was in Alaska last month and an appeal to meet this week in D.C. All of these requests have been denied. Secretary Haaland continues to shun Iñupiat voices by ignoring or declining all of the North Slope's entreaties.

"Secretary Haaland's lack of engagement with the Iñupiat is not just a shameful dereliction of duty; it is a violation of the rule of law," said **Doreen Leavitt, Director of Natural Resources at the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope (ICAS)**, the region's federally recognized tribal government. "According to the [1934 Indian Reorganization Act](#), the Secretary is obligated to honor her government-to-government relationships with federally recognized tribes like ICAS."

The federal government's poorly crafted policies will undoubtedly have a massive impact on the North Slope. But the changes are so great that Alaska Native communities need more than the brief 60- and 70-day public comments periods provided for the ANWR draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and NPR-A proposed rule, respectively. Concerningly, there have been only three public

meetings on the North Slope about these proposed policies, none of which explored the impacts of the administration's new rules affecting ANWR.

“We reminded the Secretary and her staff that our people are a generation removed from third-world conditions unrecognizable to most Americans,” said **North Slope Borough Mayor Josiah Patkotak**. “Please don’t take us back to a time when we had to send our children thousands of miles away for school, medical care, and work. I am confident that we can achieve a future that benefits us all – economically, environmentally, and socially – and that prevents a return to the conditions and hardships of those who walked before us just 50 years ago.”

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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.