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U.S. House of Representatives Defends Indigenous Self-Determination on Alaska’s North Slope with Passage of HR 6285

The “Alaska’s Right to Produce Act” pushes back on recent unprecedented federal attacks on Indigenous communities and advances North Slope Iñupiat self-determination on their ancestral homelands.

Anchorage, AK – Today, the U.S. House of Representatives passed [HR 6285](#), “Alaska’s Right to Produce Act,” introduced by Rep. Pete Stauber (R-MN) in response to the Biden administration’s unprecedented, unilateral September 2023 decisions impacting North Slope Iñupiat homelands within the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) and Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). The bill would reverse the federal government’s mandates in NPR-A and ANWR and reflect overwhelming opposition to the Department of the Interior (DOI)’s actions by North Slope Iñupiat communities, whose voices have repeatedly been ignored by the administration.

“Since the Biden administration announced this decision in September, our voices, which overwhelmingly reject the federal government’s decisions, have been consistently drowned out and ignored,” said [Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat President Nagruk Harcharek](#). “This administration has not followed its well-documented promises to work with Indigenous people when crafting policies affecting their lands and people. We are grateful to Congress for exercising its legislative authority to correct the federal government’s hypocrisy and advance Iñupiaq self-determination in our ancestral homelands.”

The Biden administration’s decisions are not aligned with the North Slope Iñupiat after it grossly mismanaged the public engagement process and cut local Indigenous elected officials out of policy discussions. DOI Secretary Haaland herself has ignored or denied at least eight meeting requests by North Slope elected Indigenous leadership, including during her visit to Alaska in the fall of 2023.

“The Biden administration is regulating our homelands in a region they do not understand and without listening to the people who live here,” said **City of Kaktovik Mayor Nathan Gordon, Jr.** “The City of Kaktovik is the only community located within ANWR’s roughly 19 million acres, yet the federal government is unilaterally making decisions, further isolating our remote community. The Alaska’s Right to Produce Act is a vital corrective measure that will prevent our community from being isolated and protect our Iñupiaq culture in the long term.”

Local Indigenous leaders [provided testimony](#) to the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources in support of Alaska's Right to Produce Act. This testimony also outlined how the Biden administration's actions in ANWR violate congressional intent, which was developed with input from Kaktovik, and past federal recommendations to develop the Section 1002 area, whose leases account for only .01% of ANWR's total land area. It is vital that the Senate observe the wishes of North Slope Indigenous communities on by quickly passing the Alaska's Right to Produce Act.

“We refuse to be passive spectators to decisions impacting our ancestral homelands,” said **Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation President Charles Lampe**. “We will continue to fight for the passage of Alaska's Right to Produce Act and our right to self-determination. We will not rest until we receive the respect we deserve from DOI and the Biden administration.”

The bill's advancement follows DOI's recent move to finalize its NPR-A Proposed Rule, which would restrict access to over 50% of the North Slope Iñupiat's ancestral NPR-A homelands despite [widespread opposition](#) by Indigenous communities who live on the North Slope. The administration is expected to soon advance its unnecessary supplemental environmental impact statement within ANWR, including the lands surrounding Kaktovik.

“America is a country governed by law. But when it comes to North Slope Iñupiat lands, the federal government refuses to follow rules and regulations – as if they are above the law – demanding consultation with federally recognized tribal governments,” said **ICAS Director of Natural Resources and Tribal Council Secretary Doreen Leavitt**. “The administration's actions are not only unjust; they are illegal. We are grateful that HR 6285 will mend this breach and ensure that our voices are not only heard but reflected in federal policy. And quyanapqak to Rep. Stauber for taking on the late Rep. Don Young's (R-AK) issues as if they were your own.”

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About Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat

VOICE is a nonprofit organization established in 2015 by the region's collective elected Iñupiat leadership and is 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. VOICE's Board of Directors previously issued a resolution in opposition to the federal government's Proposed Rule affecting the North Slope Iñupiat's ancestral homelands in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A).