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U.S. House of Representatives' Reconciliation Bill Misses Opportunities To Advance North Slope Iñupiat Self-Determination

Anchorage, AK – Today, the U.S. House of Representatives advanced their budget reconciliation bill, which includes provisions that would advance lease sales in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). While North Slope Iñupiat leaders applaud efforts to restore our Indigenous rights in ANWR, it is troubling that House legislators made a last-minute decision to omit language that would reinstate development rights in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). As a result, the bill misses a significant opportunity to reinforce the strategic importance of our North Slope homelands to America's energy dominance, promote regional economic development to sustain Indigenous culture, and advance Iñupiat self-determination.

"We are disappointed that our ancestral homelands have once again become a bargaining chip for politics," said **VOICE President Nagruk Harcharek**. "We are encouraged to see the ANWR provisions made it in the final House bill, but it is troubling that congressional policymakers did away with provisions affecting the NPR-A, which is wholly contained within our homelands. Today's developments show that much work remains to be done to advance durable congressional policies to ensure that North Slope Iñupiat communities, economy, and culture may continue to thrive for decades to come."

VOICE's members, which include the elected Indigenous leadership of Kaktovik – the only community within ANWR – and Atqasuk, located within the NPR-A, were [unified in opposition](#) to the previous administration's unilateral actions on our homelands without meaningful engagement and consultation.

"For Kaktovik, this legislation is about being seen and heard by decisionmakers in Washington. From the beginning, we've emphasized that as the sole Indigenous community within ANWR, it is critical the Kaktovikmiut's perspective be reflected in policies affecting our ancestral homelands, including the Refuge's Coastal Plain," said **Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation President Charles Lampe**. "The bill's provisions about ANWR recognizes our right to economic self-determination; it opens the door for us to shape our future on our terms."

"The outcome of this vote is a positive sign that Congress is listening to North Slope Iñupiat communities like Kaktovik," said **City of Kaktovik Mayor Nathan Gordon, Jr.** "We've advocated for years for our right to develop our homelands. This bill moves us one step closer to a future where a strong economy supports our Indigenous cultural traditions in the long term."

"This is a setback for Atqasuk, which has stewarded the NPR-A and its natural resources to support our community and traditions for thousands of years," said **Native Village of Atqasuk President Mary Bordeaux**. "After enduring unilateral attempts by previous administrations to restrict our opportunities on our lands, it is concerning that Congress chose at the last minute not to offer us a path toward stronger, durable policies to preserve our community, protecting our culture, and build our economy."

Over 95% of the North Slope's tax revenue is derived from taxation on resource development infrastructure. These funds support essential services, like schools, health clinics, modern water and sewer systems, and world-class wildlife management and research supporting Indigenous subsistence traditions. The proliferation of these services is directly connected to significant increases in average lifespan for the North Slope Iñupiat from just 34 years in 1969 to 77 years today – the [largest increase](#) of its kind in the United States over that period.

“To be clear, this bill's language affecting ANWR represents a much-needed victory for the North Slope, especially Kaktovik. But the absence of provisions restoring progress in the NPR-A suggests that Congress is only half-listening to our voices on issues affecting our lands and people,” said Iñupiat **Community of the Arctic Slope Tribal Secretary and Director of Natural Resources Doreen Leavitt**. “There is still much work to be done, and we urge decisionmakers in the Senate to engage with our leadership and seek policies that will correct the deeply flawed policies imposed on the NPR-A and our communities moving forward.”

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About Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE)

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.

In 2017, VOICE's board passed a resolution in support of opening the 1002 Area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to oil and gas exploration and development. VOICE was the first organization to [file a lawsuit](#) to challenge the 2024 NPR-A rule, which was crafted without meaningful engagement with those who live on the North Slope, significantly hinders economic development in the region, and presents serious risks to survival of Indigenous communities and North Slope Iñupiaq culture.