



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: June 1, 2025

Contact: voiceofthearctic@marathonstrategies.com

National Energy Dominance Council North Slope Visit Underscores Importance of Iñupiat Self-Determination

Utqiagvik, AK – This weekend, Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE) and its members welcomed the chair, vice-chair, and a key member of the National Energy Dominance Council (NEDC), including Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum, Secretary of Energy Chris Wright, and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lee Zeldin, to Alaska’s North Slope for discussions about land policy, energy development in the region, and Iñupiat self-determination. The visit, which included U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan and Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy, is another promising step by the federal government to prioritize Iñupiat voices when it comes to policies that affect our lands, communities, economy, and culture.

“This visit reflects a meaningful commitment by federal leaders to engage with our people and understand our way of life,” said **North Slope Borough Mayor Josiah Patkotak**. “True partnership goes beyond written consultation — it requires being present in our communities, listening to our elders, and recognizing the deep knowledge we hold as stewards of our ancestral lands. Our people have long understood what it means to live in balance with responsible development, and that perspective is essential to shaping a sustainable future.”

“Too often, federal decisions that affect our homelands are made without the engagement of the North Slope Iñupiat, the people these decisions will affect the most,” said **Nagruk Harcharek, President of Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat**. “This visit shows the federal government sees our communities and people as partners, not a check-the-box exercise. On the North Slope, we find strength in unity, and we look forward to strengthening our bonds with federal and congressional policymakers in support of policies that recognize, respect, and empower North Slope Iñupiat self-determination.”

Founded in 2015, VOICE is a nonprofit organization representing a coalition of North Slope federally recognized tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, municipal governments, and regional non-profits. Its mission is to protect and advance the Iñupiat people’s cultural and economic self-determination in their ancestral homelands.

During the visit, VOICE and its members emphasized the importance of engaging locally elected leaders, as they are chosen pillars of the community, early and often during the policymaking process. In pursuit of this goal, Secretaries Burgum and Wright, and Administrator Zeldin, participated in a NEDC session, where they heard from local and regional leaders about their approach to developing durable, effective policy solutions that reflect the community’s wishes and unleash the North Slope’s energy potential while protecting our way of life.

“We are pleased that three cabinet level officials chose to travel nearly 3,500 miles from Washington, D.C. to engage directly with residents of Utqiagvik, the northernmost community in the U.S.,” said **Mayor of Utqiagvik Asisaun Toovak**. “Their visit cements the growing importance of the Iñupiat perspective in federal policy – a welcome change after the previous administration’s unilateral approach

to our Indigenous homelands – and we hope to host them and other policymakers to the North Slope again in the near future.”

“This weekend’s delegation visit is an encouraging sign that the Trump administration takes their trust obligation seriously,” said **Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope Executive Director Morrie Lemen**. We look forward to building on this momentum and providing further critical insights to help shape programs and policies affecting the North Slope Iñupiat.”

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

“Today’s visit is the culmination of a lifetime of advocacy on behalf of Kaktovik and our right to steward our ANWR homelands,” said **Native Village of Kaktovik President Eddie Rexford**. “Kaktovik has endured many hardships at the hands of the federal government, including three forceful relocations and multiple efforts to deny important economic opportunities that support our community and culture. I am hopeful this is a renewal of a relationship that puts people above politics in ANWR.”

“This visit is about the Kaktovikmiut being seen and heard by decisionmakers in Washington,” said **Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation President Charles Lampe**. “For Kaktovik, the sole community within ANWR, it’s critical that our perspective is not only acknowledged but reflected in the policies that impact our ancestral homelands. Engagement at this level signals respect for our right to cultural and economic self-determination and opens the door to shaping our future on our own terms.”

“We are pleased that our voices are being heard by the federal government – even more so that they have taken the time to engage with us,” said **City of Kaktovik Mayor Nathan Gordon, Jr.** “These visits are an important opportunity to highlight the significant positive impacts of development projects on our communities. Without them, our communities and Iñupiaq culture could be at serious risk.”

“We appreciate Secretaries Burgum and Wright, and Administrator Zeldin taking the time to meet with the elected leadership of the North Slope in person,” said **ASRC President and CEO Rex A. Rock Sr.** “Visting the North Slope region is no easy journey; we are encouraged to see the federal government accept our long-standing invitation to meet us where we are. We look forward to continued dialogue that honors and ensures federal energy policy reflects the realities and needs of the people of the North Slope.”

###

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.