

January 10, 2019

North Slope Borough residents ~

Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE) was established in 2015 with the purpose of providing local advocacy and engagement from the people of the North Slope to state, federal and international forums addressing Arctic issues. Recognizing the considerable strength in bringing people together, the organization was borne from the concept that if the people of the Arctic Slope join together to speak as one, our unity could empower our communities, our region, our state and our country to make sound decisions that directly affect our well-being.

The Arctic is rapidly changing, and since its formation VOICE has also evolved to address the ever-changing needs of the region. We've worked diligently to identify and understand not only the pressing issues facing the Arctic Slope region, but also the unique challenges facing its individual communities.

In 2018, VOICE has undertaken dozens of efforts to protect the interests of Arctic Slope inhabitants. While many of these issues remain and there's considerable work to be done, we would like to highlight several of the issues we've engaged in this year and that we will continue to work towards in the future.

Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat identified the following 2018 priorities, which have driven our work this year on behalf of our members: Strengthen unity amongst and between Arctic communities, tribes and organizations; educate and raise awareness about important issues affecting the Arctic; promote culturally responsible resource and economic development; ensure sound subsistence management and food security; and address social issues affecting Arctic communities.

STRENGTHENING UNITY

VOICE and its members believe that in unity there is strength, and strength allows people to overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges and obstacles. When our communities, borough, tribal organizations, regional and village corporations, and other Arctic institutions work together in unison, we give our region the greatest hope for a promising future.

This year, in an effort to further strengthen unity and speak as one on issues affecting our communities, we reaffirmed our open invitation for all North Slope entities to join Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat. We also continued working with non-member groups to identify issues important to them in order to communicate concerns to our members and help work toward common ground. And we've made a concerted effort to broaden our collective voices by working to engage the youth through social media and other channels.

Many of the critical decisions about issues affecting our communities are still being made by people who have never stepped foot in the Arctic. If we stand together – and work together – we can change that.

RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT IMPORTANT ARCTIC ISSUES

Being a local knowledge center for the region regarding developments in the Arctic has been one of the purposes of VOICE since its inception. Serving as a conduit for information transfer amongst and between our eight communities – and with outside governmental and nongovernmental organizations – means listening to both member and non-member communities about important issues and making sure concerns are ultimately incorporated into any decision-making process.

To that end, Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat conducted an extensive borough-wide telephone survey to capture the needs, concerns and important issues affecting the region, its communities and people. The survey will serve as a valuable tool in understanding the priorities of the region, as well as those of the individual villages, and will provide VOICE with a road map for education and advocacy efforts in 2019 and beyond.

As you know, global warming has been a relevant issue for some time and those of us living in the Arctic are on the front lines of climate change. From warming sea ice to coastal erosion, we see its affects first-hand. At our annual board meeting in March, VOICE was joined by Governor Walker and Lt. Governor Mallott to discuss the Climate Action for Alaska Leadership Team (CALT). We participated in several CALT meetings throughout 2018 and engaged with Alaska leadership on important climate-related issues such as mitigation, adaptation, research and response.

In September, VOICE hosted an NPR-A Grants Workshop for city mayors, administrators and Tribal leaders in Fairbanks. The workshop was geared toward providing information on the State of Alaska-funded NPR-A Impact Mitigation Program, which makes royalty money from oil and gas activity available to North Slope city governments to fund public service and facility projects in NPR-A communities.

To raise public awareness about these important issues, and the others listed throughout this letter, in 2018 VOICE hosted informational booths at the Week of the Arctic, Alaska Federation of Natives, Alaska Forum on the Environment and Resource Development Council Conference.

RESPONSIBLE RESOURCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In 2017, the VOICE board of directors passed a resolution supporting exploratory drilling in the 1002 Area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). On December 22 of that year, ANWR became available for oil and gas drilling when President Trump signed into the law the *Tax Cuts & Jobs Act*.

Throughout 2018, VOICE held a series of listening sessions in Kaktovik to discuss the ANWR legislation and pending lease sales. We met with the community in an effort to provide clarity and understanding of the process and disseminate relevant information. VOICE researched and responded to questions and concerns raised by the community, and worked with state lawmakers to ensure they understood those concerns. We will continue to work with the Kaktovikmiut on this important issue as the process progresses.

Residents of the Arctic Slope have long shared the desire to connect our communities, and have understood the importance of creating needed infrastructure to support our region's economy. With the passage of the capital budget in July, Alaska is committing millions of dollars to further North Slope infrastructure improvements under the Arctic Strategic Transportation and Resources (ASTAR) project.

Part of the funding is set aside for a new effort to study Arctic roads, with the ultimate goal of assessing the development of permanent roads connecting North Slope villages. If developed, the roads would make travel between neighboring villages substantially cheaper and access to remote oil and gas resources significantly easier.

Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat met with the State of Alaska Natural Resources Commissioner to make it clear that we wish to be fully involved in any decisions made so that the needs of the North Slope people remain a priority.

Finally, VOICE hosted an Indigenous Consultation Workshop in partnership with the Arctic Council Sustainable Development Working Group to emphasize the importance of including indigenous peoples, local perspectives and traditional knowledge into the National Environmental Policy Act and Environmental Impact Statement processes when it comes to Arctic development projects.

SOUND SUBSISTENCE MANAGEMENT

Subsistence remains one of the backbones of Arctic Slope culture and Iñupiat identity. As such, VOICE has been actively involved in ever-evolving legislation and policy that could adversely affect Native subsistence rights and food security. We've tracked research and studies done on critical subsistence species and disseminated pertinent information to slope communities. We've also consistently monitored and weighed-in on state and federally imposed subsistence quotas, among other things.

Some examples of VOICE's work on subsistence issues this year include: Engaging with U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke to express concern about the inclusion of subsistence whaling areas in the 2019-2024 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program; opposing the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling on the listing of ringed seals as a threatened species; ongoing work to amend the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Polar Bear Treaty placing taking limits on the subsistence harvest of Chukchi and northern Bering Sea polar bears; and many more.

VOICE will continue to communicate with affected communities when it comes to subsistence rights and concerns, and remain vigilant in our work with lawmakers to allow for maximum local input when shaping any regulation or policy initiatives impacting Iñupiat way of life.

SOCIAL ISSUES

As part of our 2018 North Slope Borough-wide survey, we asked people about the most important social issues facing their communities. From substance abuse and education to employment and housing, VOICE is in the process of gathering a priority list of issues based on that feedback, and has begun researching, capturing and publishing resources on our website with tools and information for the public to access.

OUR VOICE. OUR VISION.

Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat continues to be inspired and empowered by our members to address the needs of our region and its people. Over the past four years we have taken on countless initiatives in order to ensure a healthy, sustainable and thriving Arctic, and to make sure our collective voices are no longer marginalized by outside interests.

VOICE enters 2019 with tremendous cause for optimism. As we usher in a new Governor and his administration, and state lawmakers convene in Juneau for the 31st legislative session, we have the opportunity to realize the bright future we envision for the North Slope. We have the ability to be involved, stand our ground and speak as one on issues important to our communities. We will forever be remembered for the work we undertake today and the positive impact our efforts have on future generations.

Taikuu,



Sayers Tuzroyluk
President, Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat