

Hearing on HJR No. 12

March 1, 2021

Statement of Matthew Rexford

President of Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation

and

Tribal Administrator of Native Village of Kaktovik

Quyanaq Representative Patkotak and other members present today for the invitation to speak and support **HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 12.**

My name is Matthew Rexford and I represent the community of Kaktovik, the only community inside the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, known as ANWR (also known and referred to as the Refuge), but more importantly Kaktovik is the only community inside the Coastal Plain area of ANWR – the area covered by your Resolution. In many ways, I find it frustrating that ANWR is still an issue of public debate – my community has supported oil and gas leasing in the Coastal Plain for many decades and it was not until the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 that we were able to realize our vision. I have to admit that I am extreme frustrated that it took seventeen paragraphs before the Kaktovikmiut are even mentioned in HJR No. 12 and that caribou are mentioned before the people. You are speaking of my homeland, our children have been raised in this region and our ancestors are buried here. It seems that the Kaktovikmiut, my people, continue to be overlooked between the arguments over oil and gas and Caribou which in many national discussions we have been erased- yet ANWR would not have been opened without our efforts.

Despite my frustration, I am speaking today to urge you to support HJR No. 12 and to state that by doing so you will support the Kaktovikmiut in the farthest northeast corner of the State. We oppose any attempts to designate ANWR as a National Monument. I will keep my comments brief because our list of grievances is long.

Our community has continually been caught between federal actions that impact our ability to realize our visions of a vibrant and sustainable future. The Alaska

Native Claims Settlement Act of 1974 (ANCSA) was supposed to allow our Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation (KIC) the economic freedoms to develop its lands to benefit our community. However, ANCSA was followed by the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1987 (ANILCA) which compromised KIC's ability to access and develop its lands. Kaktovik did not want to be an island in the middle of a Refuge but it happened anyway. Having lived in the Refuge since ANILCA I am here to tell you that life has been difficult, and the federal management agency has not performed its duty to our community as required. We would not expect that to change if ANWR was designated a national monument.

By example, in February 2020, our school burned to the ground. We immediately applied for an overland permit to move temporary school modules across the coastal plain – as an in-holder of the Refuge we have rights under ANILCA that were not provided to us. As a last minute stop-gap measure we were forced to move the modules over the sea-ice to our community which added significant risk to the transport operation. Representative Patkotak, you understand the challenge that we faced as a community to achieve moving modules before we lost the sea-ice route. This represents a failure by the Refuge land management agency to acknowledge our rights.

We support oil and gas development not only on our lands but on the adjacent federal lands to provide for economic opportunities to our people through jobs and new business development. Our tribe, corporation, and city government all actively participated not only in the public process, but also in government-to-government consultation, of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) performed the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) development and supported full leasing of the entire Coastal Plain with the mitigations and stipulation presented in the Record of Decision. Potential development of the coastal plain is not only important for Kaktovik's economy, but also critical for the long-term economic sustainability of our municipal government, the North Slope Borough (NSB). Without the services the NSB provides Kaktovik, and the other seven communities within the North Slope of Alaska would still be living in third-world conditions. The life expectancy of the Iñupiat has increased 13-years since development of oil within our region due to the borough providing for clean water and sanitation in our communities. We can not turn the clock back – we are part of the United

States and demand first world amenities and until we find something else to provide for our health and economic well-being we are fundamentally a people dependent on resource development. We have been able to come to terms with that paradox while at the same time providing appropriate protections to our subsistence resources and the lands and waters they are dependent on.

We recognize that exploration is the first phase of opportunity for our community – I am sure that you have seen in the press last week surrounding our inability to receive permits to perform a low-impact seismic program over our lands. Seismic is an important step to determine whether there are potential drillable targets for oil and gas. Due to our location, this was an important project to identify local natural gas targets that could be developed as a long-term energy resource and move our community away from its reliance of diesel and our only energy source. However, again we were thwarted by the federal government to progress toward a sustainable future.

Again, I request that you support HJR No. 12. I will also leave you with this request and that is to not forget about the people, my people, in the future. Thank you for your time and invitation.

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