

Written Testimony

**Testimony of Charlotte Brower
Mayor, North Slope Borough, Alaska
February 19, 2014**

**Before the
House Natural Resources Committee
Alaska State Legislature
Legislative Hearing on HJR26**

Chairman Saddler, Chairman Feige, and Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Charlotte Brower. I am honored to be the Mayor of the North Slope Borough, the wife of a whaling captain, and am blessed with six children and twenty-five grandchildren.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on HJR26, a resolution urging the United States Congress to provide for sharing with local areas the revenue from oil and gas development on our outer continental shelf.

On July 23rd of this past summer, I was invited to testify before the US Senate Energy Committee in support of S. 1273, known as the “Fixing America’s Inequities with Revenues Act of 2013”, or “FAIR Act”.

Today I am here before you to express support for HJR26 as a way to help secure passage of measures like S. 1273 in Washington DC. By working together as Alaskans, we need to send a message for receiving a fair and equitable distribution of revenues that come from energy development on our outer Continental Shelf (OCS).

Congress should pass legislation to ensure that State and local governments will have resources to keep up with infrastructure requirements, expand emergency response and search and rescue capabilities, take an active role in oil spill preparedness, and work to maintain healthy communities and a healthy ecosystem.

The North Slope Borough is the largest municipality in the United States, encompassing over 94,000 square miles, including more than 8,000 miles of Arctic coastline along the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas.

The majority of North Slope residents are Iñupiat Eskimos. We are heavily dependent upon marine mammals (such as bowhead and beluga whales, seals and walrus) to sustain our physical health and our cultural and spiritual well-being. The importance of Subsistence in our coastal communities and marine environment goes beyond the need for food. Our unique Iñupiat culture, our traditions and our

links to our ancestors and history, are also tied to our Subsistence lifestyle, to our custom of sharing with others, and to celebrating our connection to the land and the ocean.

We are always mindful of the critical need to protect the environment and preserve our culture and our resources. However, we also recognize that our ability to continue to provide even basic services to our communities depends upon revenue from the oil and gas industry, which today primarily operates on state land in our region. Without these revenues, the North Slope Borough would not be able to maintain the airstrips, healthcare facilities, water and sewer, search and rescue or other services we provide in our villages.

What many people in the Lower 48 do not understand is that the infrastructure enjoyed today by other coastal states – paved roads, deep water ports, and modern communications – those don't exist on the North Slope.

Most people do not understand the challenges Alaska's rural governments face. As one example, a gallon of milk costs \$10 today in Barrow. That same gallon of milk might cost \$18 or more in some of our villages. Other food items such as fresh fruits and vegetables are even more expensive relative to the Lower 48, or even

other parts of Alaska. Why? Because the cost of transportation in our region is very high. And now imagine the cost to the North Slope Borough for new roads, upgrades to airstrips, new health care facilities, or new sewer or water or gas lines that must be built through permafrost.

We also face threats to the infrastructure we have in place today. With the Arctic Ocean now ice-free for a longer period every spring and fall, storms are eroding the land around some of our villages - in some cases over 5-6 feet per year. Once moderate storm consumed more than a million dollars in response costs from our Borough. Over the last ten years, the coastline near Barrow has receded toward an old landfill that holds tens of thousands of barrels of Navy and Air Force waste. Ten years ago, the ocean was 200 feet away from the landfill – now it is 120 feet away.

Coastal erosion also threatens Barrow's "utilidor" system, which is an underground system of tunnels designed to protect the city's utilities from the cold. This system provides indoor plumbing to our residents and eliminates the need for outhouses and water delivery by truck. And like most other things in the Arctic, it is very expensive.

I would also note that the oil and gas industry, researchers, and federal agencies, including the U.S. Coast Guard, all use our local infrastructure – our airports and roads and hospitals. We welcome people to our community, and we were grateful for the Coast Guard’s presence in Barrow during the 2012 drilling season, but Congress must recognize the cost to our community of maintaining and expanding critical infrastructure as industry develops offshore resources.

There is also a great deal of scientific research needed to understand how best to mitigate the impact of oil and gas development on the Arctic environment, and the North Slope Borough can and should be a part of that effort.

The last thing I would like to emphasize is the role of State and local governments in emergency preparedness associated with offshore energy development, including oil spill response. Let us pray that our Good Lord will prevent the need, but in the event of an emergency it will be the brave men and women from the North Slope Borough Search & Rescue Department and the Alaska Department of Public Safety troopers and village VPSO’s who will most likely be first on the scene.

In summary, the people of the North Slope live in one of the most undeveloped regions in our nation. Investments must be made in the infrastructure necessary to ensure that OCS development can be conducted safely and responsibly. And the burden of providing such infrastructure should not fall solely on the people that have the most to lose in case of an oil spill.

Thank you for sponsoring HJR26 to help the people of the North Slope Borough send this message to the United States Congress.