

## Safe and Responsible Development of ANWR Unlocks its Potential

I am compelled to write this in an attempt to fight the misconceptions and even intentional mistruths regarding exploration and potential development of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). While this is undeniably an emotional topic, I am disappointed and disheartened that a politically motivated false narrative, rather than scientific fact and historical context, is being used by interests outside of Alaska with no understanding of our Native Alaskan communities and partnership with the land to deny a frank and open discussion on a complicated and critical issue.

For far too long, ANWR has been portrayed by agenda-driven journalists, environmentalists and lawmakers as a mythical, lush landscape void of potential; an Arctic *Garden of Eden* where only the most privileged of backpackers and climate-change warriors are allowed to take photos and leave footprints. In reality, the Coastal Plain of ANWR *is* a very special place – where safe and responsible resource development can occur hand-in-hand with effective environmental protections. I should know, as the area has been the home of my people, the North Slope Iñupiat, for countless generations.

No one has more at stake in ensuring responsible development in ANWR than we do, and it is for this reason that I aim to set the record straight.

Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, or ASRC, is a private corporation, created by Congress in the early '70s, that represents a group of approximately 13,000 Iñupiaq shareholders, many of whom live in the harshest and most economically challenged communities in the United States. Our shareholders gave up their legitimate claims of land, never lost in any battle or given up by any treaty, in exchange for shares in ASRC, with the understanding that ASRC would work to provide dividends and protect their interests in perpetuity. ASRC is fighting hard to realize on assurances to these shareholders that it could develop its land for the economic benefit of the people it represents. This was the promise made by the government through the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, signed by President Nixon in 1971. As countless Native Americans and Native Alaskans have unfortunately learned over the last two centuries, it is far easier to obtain government promises than to make the government keep them.

In 1980, Congress set aside 1.5-million acres of land on the Coastal Plain of ANWR – known as the 1002 Area – specifically for its potential of holding massive reserves of oil and gas. Contrary to what many believe, this area is not designated as wilderness nor is it entirely owned by the federal government. On December 22, 2017, after 40-some years of broad, bi-partisan support both regionally and across Alaska, Congress finally lifted the ban, allowing the 1002 Area to live up to its promise and its potential.

This decision to allow drilling in the 1002 Area of ANWR as part of the *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act* is a monumental achievement. Green-lighting the responsible exploration and development of the 1002 Area opens the door to future economic opportunities for the North Slope and allows our communities to provide jobs and to 'keep the lights on' for many years to come – providing the basic infrastructure and opportunity so many in the Lower 48 take for granted – schools, roads, stores, community centers, running water and flushing toilets. And the resource is substantial.



The 1002 Area of ANWR holds the largest unexplored, potentially productive onshore basin on the continent. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) estimates it could hold 10.4 billion barrels of technically recoverable oil. For comparison, Alaska's second biggest oil field, Kuparuk, holds about 2.5 billion barrels. According to the House Natural Resources Committee, the potential daily peak production of ANWR – 1.45 million barrels of oil per day – is more than the U.S. imports from Saudi Arabia. The best place to find oil and ensure continued energy independence for the US – in the largest quantity with the smallest footprint – is the 1002 Area. Simply put, ANWR's resource potential, combined with key participants' proven track record of responsible Arctic development, make it the ideal place to safely and responsibly drill for oil and gas.

Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation (KIC), – the Native village corporation within the Coastal Plain of ANWR – owns 92,000 acres of surface land where exploration may occur. If and when oil is found there, members will share benefits with ASRC which owns the subsurface rights to KIC village lands. It is almost self-evident, and the assertion is strongly backed by science, that exploration of the 1002 Area can be done in a way that leaves no lasting surface effects on the tundra or its ecosystems.

Anti-development advocates are not the only ones who have the right to weigh in on this issue, and should not be granted the loudest voice or given the only seat at the table regarding the 1002 Area's future. Opinions and even doomsday predictions do not represent solid science and the multitude of compelling interests. Turning my homeland into one giant national park, off-limits to all but a select few, guarantees our people a fate with no economy, no jobs and little hope for the future.

For the economic future my communities as well as the energy security of the United States, it is critical we hold the 1002 Area of ANWR up to the light and see it for what it really is – a sliver of land in the northeast corner of Alaska teeming with natural resource potential. The time is right for this area to live up to its promise.

*Rex Rock is a whaling captain and the president and CEO of Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, which is owned by and represents the business interests of the Arctic Slope Iñupiat. With a shareholder base of approximately 13,000 people it represents eight villages on the North Slope - Point Hope, Point Lay, Wainwright, Atkasuk, Utqiaġvik (Barrow), Nuiqsut, Kaktovik and Anakuvuk Pass.*