

**Hearing on H.R. 1146, the “Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain
Protection Act”**

**Testimony
of
Fenton Rexford
Advisor the Mayor
North Slope Borough, Alaska**

March 26, 2019

**Before the
United States House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources**

Chairman Lowenthal, Ranking Member Gosar, and Members of the
Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present my comments. My name is
Fenton Rexford and I come from the community of Kaktovik, where
I was born and raised, to speak to you on behalf of my people and
myself. Kaktovik is the only community within the boundaries of

the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. We are the only community located within the Coastal Plain of ANWR.

The legislation introduced by Congressman Huffman declares that it is the policy of the United States to “sustain” the Coastal Plain of ANWR as a “natural treasure for the current generation of Americans” and “to honor and respect the human rights of the Gwich’in.”

We agree that the human rights of the Gwich’in people must be honored and respected. But there are many tribes in Alaska with diverse interests in many resources, including caribou, fish, birds, moose, whales, seals, minerals, timber, and even oil and gas. There are 32 caribou herds in Alaska, and every one of those herds deserves to be protected, and the rights of the Native people to continue hunting those animals also should be respected.

Within Alaska, we try to balance our use of these resources to benefit all communities. But within each region, we try to show respect for the people who are from that place.

Your legislation doesn't mention the human rights of the Kaktovikmiut. Your legislation doesn't mention the Kaktovikmiut at all. It doesn't mention the Iñupiat people. What about our rights? What about our land, which has been our home since time immemorial? What about our resources? What about our interest in the Porcupine caribou herd, on which we rely as well? What about our voice? Do you intend for us to disappear? We do not exist in your legislation.

I would like to give you a short history of our land and our relationships with outside groups. Growing up, we considered our homelands to extend from the continental divide in the Brooks Range to the Arctic Ocean; from the Sagavanirktok River on the west, well into Canada on the east.

Our tribe had over 23 million acres of lands that we have inhabited, used for hunting, fishing, gathering, and raised our families on for over 11,000 years. Then the Federal Government showed up.

- In 1867, the United States purchased all of Alaska from Russia, even though Russia did not exercise dominion over our lands. The Senate ratified the purchase and Congress funded it.
- In 1947, the military arrived on Barter Island to build a 5,000-foot runway and hangar. We were told to move our village. Our homes were bulldozed and our ice cellars were filled in.
- In 1950, the U.S. Department of the Interior restricted game hunting to just one caribou and one sheep per person, restricting our ability to feed our families.
- In 1951, the Village of Kaktovik and most of our island was withdrawn for a military reserve by Public Land Order 82.
- In 1953, the military directed our village to move a second time.
- In 1957, an application for the withdrawal of lands to create an Arctic Wildlife Range was filed. The first group to propose the withdrawal was a sportsmen's group from another region of Alaska that wanted to protect their interest in our region.

- In 1958, Congress passed the Alaska Statehood Act, which did not protect our interest in the land.
- In 1960, the Secretary of the Interior issued Public Land Order 2214, reserving the Arctic National Wildlife Range. The Range was established without Kaktovik's input and without consultation. Our rights to hunt were now restricted further.
- In 1964, the military directed our village to move a third time.
- In 1971, Congress passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Kaktovik receive just four townships of land within our region. Congress terminated our aboriginal land claims and our hunting and fishing rights.
- In 1980, Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, which renamed ANWR a "Refuge," increased the size of the Refuge, and imposed new restrictions on hunting and fishing and access to the land. Congress claimed to protect our access to the Refuge, but we have struggled for 4 decades to exercise our subsistence rights and our right to travel across the land managed by the Fish and Wildlife

Service. Once again, the interests of outside conservation groups have trumped the interests of our people.

- We had to spend more than four decades lobbying Congress to allow oil and gas leasing within the Coastal Plain. Even leasing on Native-owned lands required an act of Congress.

Since the Federal Government showed up 152 years ago, outside groups have used the Federal Government as a tool to assert their own interest in our land. To protect our interests, we have formed a powerful government -- the North Slope Borough -- to make sure that all activities in our region return benefit to our people and our communities.

As Iñupiat, we maintain our traditional values, while our culture continues to evolve and adapt to the changing world around us. We are not an exhibit in a museum. Nor should the lands that we have survived and thrived from for centuries be locked away for the peace of mind of those from faraway places. This school of thought amounts to nothing more than green colonialism – a political

occupation of our lands in the name of the environment while others exploit the idea of Wilderness for economic gain.

Thank you for listening to me. Quyanaq.