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Arctic Tribal Leader Speaks Out Against Dangerous Arctic Drilling

WASHINGTON – At today’s House subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources hearing entitled “Domestic Oil and Natural Gas: Alaskan Resources, Access and Infrastructure,” a key Arctic tribal leader listened from the audience as members of Congress debated the future of her culture and her people. Caroline Cannon, president of the Native Village of Point Hope, a vibrant Inupiat community on the Chukchi Sea, traveled to Washington to ensure that those with the most to lose from Arctic drilling will have their voices heard on Capitol Hill.

Also today, the House Energy and Commerce Committee marked up [H.R. 2021](#), a bill that would give Shell Oil a free pass to pollute in America’s Arctic Ocean. This bill would not only impact the health of communities like Point Hope, but it also aims to eliminate the ability for Arctic residents to appeal Clean Air Act issues through the Environmental Protection Agency’s Environmental Appeals Board (EAB), while still allowing Shell and other oil companies to use the EAB.

Following is a statement from Caroline Cannon, President, Native Village of Point Hope:

“America’s Arctic is my home. It has been home to generations that have come before me. I am fighting today to ensure that it will continue to be home to the generations that come after me. Point Hope, Alaska is the oldest settlement in North America. The cultural and subsistence traditions of Point Hope are linked to the health of the Arctic ecosystem and the resources of our traditional lands and waters.

There is no proven technology to clean up oil spills in the Beaufort, Chukchi or Bering Seas, including in solid or broken ice conditions, and even in open water, especially when the sea is rough as it often is. I am haunted by the worry that an oil spill will occur in our waters.

I envision what our home would be like if such a disaster would occur. The damage can last a lifetime. I worry that our land and water would forever be contaminated by oil. The animals would either disappear or be so contaminated that my children or grandchildren would be forced to decide which is less harmful to them: contaminated whale meat or processed food shipped up from someplace like Costco. I know genocide is a harsh word but that’s what it would be. I want to stress that scientifically it’s been proven that our people who eat our Native foods are healthier. The processed foods are not good for us. And it’s not just the food -- it’s our way of life, our identity.

I know we have to fight for our rights to a clean environment and the continuation of our culture and traditions because that is what our elders have dictated. We are to do everything in our power to protect our water, our land, our way of life. The proposed oil and gas activities affect the very foundations of who we are as individuals and as a people. We have a right to life, to physical integrity, to security, and the right to enjoy the benefits of our culture. For this, we will fight; we just hope not to die as a people during the process.”

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