

November 29, 2017

Dear Member of Congress:

Over the past several decades our faith communities – religious leaders, congregants, and religious organizations – have advocated to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Tens of thousands of the faithful, an unprecedented number in both its magnitude and diversity, have urged the Administration and Congress to protect this unique part of God’s creation that stands alone in its wilderness, ecological integrity, and beauty.

As heads of national and regional faith organizations, we urge you to oppose any provision in the upcoming budget and tax package that would allow for oil exploration or drilling in the Arctic Refuge. Such a provision not only runs counter to God’s stewardship call, but is inappropriate for consideration in a tax reform bill.

This sacred landscape is home of the Gwich’in, an Alaska native people who depend upon the Porcupine caribou herd for their daily subsistence and who ground their religious faith in the sacredness of God’s creation found on the Coastal Plain.

In the Scriptural creation common to both the Jewish and Christian traditions, God proclaims each piece of creation good, and the whole of it – when viewed together and in relationship – very good. The Gwich’in people and their interdependence with the ecosystem of the Coastal Plain embody this right relationship. And, it is therefore our hope and prayer that you will join us in recognizing that such a precious gift deserves our best efforts at stewardship and preservation.

The exploitation of fossil fuels that contribute to climate change threatens the ten thousand year-old way of life enjoyed by the Gwich’in people. Drilling would also threaten the sacred spaces held in reverence by the Gwich’in, who are predominantly Episcopalian. Our commitment to protecting the Arctic Refuge is inspired by our dedication to defending all of God’s creation, including the fundamental rights of the Gwich’in people both in securing their livelihoods and holding fast to their religious liberties.

We urge you to do all that you can to safeguard the Gwich’in people and the extraordinary and sacred wilderness of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Our prayers are with you,

Rev. Dr. Don Anderson
Executive Minister
Rhode Island State Council of Churches

Rev. Paul Benz
Co-Director
Faith Action Network - Washington State

Rev. Traci D. Blackmon
Executive, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Church of Christ

Dr. Timothy T. Boddie
General Secretary
Progressive National Baptist Convention

Sr. Danielle Bonetti
Congregational Leadership Team
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet

Janice Cebula, OSF
President
Sisters of St. Francis, Clinton, Iowa

Sister Michaela Connolly, OP
Prioress
Sisters of St. Dominic

Reverend Peter Cook
Executive Director
New York State Council of Churches

Rev. Dr. Jennifer Copeland
Executive Director
North Carolina Council of Churches

Rev. Steve Copley
Chair
Faith Voices Arkansas

Rev. John C. Dorhauer
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ

Sr. Susan Gatz, SCN
President
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth

Rev. Dr. Donald K. Gillett, II
Executive Director
Kentucky Council of Churches

Toni Harris, OP
Prioress
Dominicans of Sinsinawa

Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe
General Secretary
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society

Rev. Mitch Hescoc
President/CEO
Evangelical Environmental Network

Sister Maureen Irvin, osf
Congregational Minister
Sisters of St. Francis

Rev. Dr. Raymond Johnson
Coordinator
Florida Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Sister Julie Kubasak, D.C.
Provincial Superior
Daughters of Charity, Province of the West

Sr. Shelia Lemieux, CSJP
Congregation Leader
Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace

The Rev. Dr. Russell L. Meyer
Executive Director
Florida Council of Churches

Sister Patricia McDermott, RSM
President
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Sister Mary Moore
Provincial Minister
Felician Sisters of North American, Inc.

Sr. Mary Anne Owens, SSND
Provincial Leader
Central Pacific Province
School Sisters of Notre Dame

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner
Director
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Shantha Ready Alonso
Executive Director
Creation Justice Ministries

Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb
Chair
Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life

Sister Patricia Siemen, OP
Prioress
Adrian Dominican Sisters

Joan Marie Steadman, CSC
Executive Director
Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Sister Patricia Vetrano, RSM
President
Sisters of Mercy Mid-Atlantic Community

Sister Veronique Wiedower CSC
President
Sisters of the Holy Cross

Jim Winkler
General Secretary
National Council of Churches USA