

December 11, 2017

Dear Member of Congress,

As state leaders in the black church, we write to urge you to oppose drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as part of the tax reform bill.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a part of God's creation that is one of America's last intact wilderness areas---unique in its ecological integrity and beauty. This sacred landscape is also home of the Gwich'in, an Alaska native people who depend upon the Porcupine caribou herd for their daily subsistence. One of the first casualties due to disturbances from drilling in the Coastal Plain of the refuge would be the caribou population, which in turn would destroy the Gwich'in way of life.

As pastors and religious leaders, we are gravely concerned about the injustice that would be borne by a people who have lived in the Arctic Refuge for tens of thousands of years. The Gwich'in people rely on the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge, not only for food security, but for their spiritual wellbeing. For the Gwich'in the Coastal Plain is "the place where life begins."

As black church leaders, we are also struck by the similar injustices continually faced by the African American community. We may live far from Alaska, but our plight as African Americans is one and the same, and thus the call to protect the land of the Gwich'in, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, is a common cause.

The possibility of oil exploration in the Refuge jeopardizes the ecological integrity of the Refuge and the way of life of the Gwich'in people. We ask you to be just and compassionate and prevent oil exploration or drilling in this precious part of God's creation.

Sincerely,

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