

President Barack Obama
The White House

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary of the Interior

November 18, 2016

Dear President Obama and Secretary Jewell:

As Christian faith leaders, we believe the first work God called us to do in the book of Genesis was to care for all of God's good creation. We see caring for God's creation as a holistic task, in which economic and ecological wellbeing are intertwined. Climate change is challenging our ministries at a scale that is unprecedented.

Today, we write with gratitude for your prudent decision to revoke permits to drill in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas under the Department of Interior's 2017-2022 Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

Our communities face grief, lamentation, and alarm over the rapid devastation of Arctic ecology and Native Alaskan subsistence lifestyles. We are gravely concerned about the expansion of oil and gas drilling in highly sensitive and vulnerable parts of God's creation in the Arctic Ocean.

The Arctic is experiencing global warming at nearly twice the rate of the rest of the world. We are grateful you came to understand our reality first hand when you visited Alaska. The Arctic Science Ministerial convened at The White House in September also highlighted scientific studies that unequivocally showed the climate change's devastating impact.

We have a moral responsibility to help communities and ecosystems most impacted by climate change to adapt, and to become more resilient in a changing world. The sensitive Arctic ecosystem is home to whales, seals, polar bears and many others species. The stress climate change is placing on that ecosystem is of grave concern to the Native communities that depend on the gifts of God's creation to support their subsistence cultures as well as indigenous spiritualities.

Now is the time to make difficult decisions about fossil fuels. Our communities feel pressure to provide for their families, and some see fossil fuels as the only choice for economic opportunity. We reject the premise that families must choose between eating today, and providing for all of creation tomorrow. We need new economic opportunities for Alaska that will bring blessings not only today, but to future generations. We pledge to work with our faith communities toward such solutions.

The risks of drilling in the Arctic Ocean are extremely high. The consequences could be very grave. With Shell and other oil companies indicating they will not pursue drilling in the Arctic "for the foreseeable future," it is wise for the Administration to take a step back and approach future energy development in the Arctic with extreme prudence.

Thank you for making the hard but prudent decision. Thank you for weighing carefully the moral responsibilities before you as oil and gas leasing decision-makers.

You remain, as always, in our prayers.

Sincerely,

Bishop David Mahaffey
Diocese of Sitka and Alaska, Orthodox Church in America
Anchorage, Alaska

Rev. Carlo A. Rapanut
Superintendent
Alaska United Methodist Conference
Anchorage, Alaska

The Rev. Shelley Wickstrom
Bishop
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Rev. Curt Karns
Executive Presbyter
Presbytery of the Yukon
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The Rt. Rev. Mark Lattime
Bishop
Diocese of Alaska, The Episcopal Church
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