

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,

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Executive Minister
Rhode Island State Council of Churches

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

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Executive, Justice and Witness Ministries
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