

**Testimony of Charlotte Brower
Mayor, North Slope Borough, Alaska
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**Before the
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate**

Chairman Murkowski, Members of the Committee:

My name is Charlotte Brower and I'm the Mayor of the North Slope Borough. I'm also an Inupiaq Eskimo; and, in addition to being the wife of a whaling captain, I'm a mother to 6 children and 25 grandchildren. I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on how the United States can build on its status as an Arctic nation. Since my people have lived in the Arctic since time immemorial, I feel I may be able to add a valuable perspective to the dialogue today.

First, I would be remiss if I did not mention how grateful we are to have our very own Senator, Lisa Murkowski, looking out for the needs of the Inupiat people and all those who live on the North Slope of Alaska. She has been a tireless champion for those of us who are often ignored by policymakers here in Washington and her leadership on Arctic issues is essential. Thank you Lisa for your friendship and support.

America is an Arctic nation. And that fact doesn't come as a surprise for those of us that live there everyday. But over the last decade we've seen an explosion of interest in the Arctic from nations across the globe, and now suddenly, everyone has an idea of how this part of the world should be managed.

Over the past few years we have watched our federal government outline its strategy for the Arctic as it prepares to assume the chairmanship of the Arctic Council. Sadly, this process has unfurled in the vacuum of our nation's capital- thousands of miles removed from America's Arctic people and without an opportunity for meaningful local input.

And while one of the thematic elements of our country's upcoming chairmanship comprises improving the economic and living conditions of

Arctic residents, it seems like our government is expending more time, energy, and focus on the other two elements of its Arctic strategy.

This fact is exemplified in the detailed plans laid out for the creation of a pan-Arctic network of Marine Protected Areas or other initiatives aimed to tackle black carbon and ocean acidification. On the other hand, the strategy for addressing economic and living conditions is limited to things like studies on telecommunication infrastructure, fresh water sources, and green-energy initiatives.

While some of these issues are important, they pale in comparison to the acute, current needs of America's Arctic residents and they fail to further our status as an Arctic nation. In some ways it seems like our national strategy for the Arctic is akin to fixing the mailbox while the house burns down.

Today we face a reality of hoping that our communities are not inundated by coastal flooding, hoping that our water and sewer services will function so we can enjoy luxuries such as a flush toilet, hoping that multiple families will not have to live together in cramped houses, or hoping that our children will be able to find meaningful full-time employment and that the cycle of drug and alcohol abuse and suicide will end.

These are the issues that concern Arctic peoples. If our country wants to be serious about Arctic issues, then it must formulate a strategy on how these types of issues can be resolved. This is where we stand ready to work with our federal policymakers.

The area in which our country most falls short in the Arctic arena is infrastructure. We simply lack the infrastructure we need to protect our national interests, our environment, the economy, and the health and wellbeing of Arctic peoples. And the most effective way that the federal government can promote the growth of critical infrastructure is through policies that promote and encourage economic development.

In America's Arctic, this means the development of natural resources.

If you were to travel to the North Slope 70 years ago you would find a semi-nomadic people subsisting off the land and living in sod houses much like their ancestors had for millennia. But the discovery of oil in Prudhoe Bay in the 1960's changed all of that.

In a period of roughly 30 years, we experienced over 200 years worth of development and advancement. We formed a local, home-rule government and built roads, airports, schools, hospitals, houses, and utilities. We provided police, fire, first responder, and search and rescue services. Our people went from burning whale oil to keep warm to having natural gas heaters.

The property taxes we collect from oil and gas infrastructure still accounts for over 97% of the revenue collected by the North Slope Borough to provide local public services. It also generates private sector revenue streams and jobs through our local and regional Native Corporations that are shared with other Native Corporations throughout the state and are distributed as dividends to local shareholders. These funds provide the economic lifeblood of our region. They allow us to be self-sufficient, allow our communities to grow, and even provide the means for us to conduct our subsistence activities.

Our experiences have also taught us that natural resource development and a healthy environment are not mutually exclusive goals. Billions of barrels of oil have been extracted from the North Slope without any significant spills or environmental damage. We have watched the Central Arctic Caribou herd, which calves throughout Prudhoe Bay, thrive. And our borough instituted a robust permitting system that drives the oil industry to minimize and mitigate negative impacts. As a result, our subsistence way of life has flourished along with our local economy.

But land management designations and policies aimed at blocking resource development across America's Arctic, will usher in the end of this era of prosperity. And when these decisions are made without meaningful local input, they are at best paternalistic, and at worst exploitative.

If our federal officials were to consult us, they might begin to understand that their policies will lead us to a future where we struggle to provide basic public services, where our subsistence practices and food security are put in peril because our people can no longer afford to hunt, where our culture and communities wither because our residents are forced to leave our villages and move to the big cities, and where those that remain dwindle in the hopelessness of lost jobs and opportunities. Our quest for self-determination will be replaced by a complete dependency on the government.

As a mother and a grandmother, the thought of leaving such a fate to my children and grandchildren is unbearable. If we are to build a strong foundation to support America's status as an Arctic nation, our Arctic strategy must include the safe and responsible development of our natural resources.

We would also like to see Congress acknowledge the disparity in federal revenue sharing laws by allowing Alaskans to share in the royalty revenue derived from outer continental shelf oil and gas leasing and development like residents of the Gulf Coast. The people that bear the greatest risks from these activities should be able to realize some of the benefit. These funds would go a long way in helping us to provide for the kinds of infrastructure needs we face and also allow us to respond to the challenges that a changing Arctic presents.

As one example of a local initiative aimed to confront the increased amount of shipping through Arctic waters, the North Slope Borough has partnered with the Northwest Arctic Borough, the City of Nome, and the Alaska Marine Mammal Commission in the formation of an Arctic Waterway Safety Committee (AWSC). The purpose of this organization largely consists of three main goals: 1) To bring together key stakeholders for the establishment of safe practices for vessel transit through Arctic waters from the Bering Sea through the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas; 2) To help ensure the long-term health of the Arctic ecosystem and marine mammals; and, 3) To help ensure the safety of all mariners at sea.

Membership of the AWSC will consist of representatives from subsistence hunting groups, industry representatives (such as oil and gas, tug and barge, and tourism), the regional municipal governments, a regional tribal organization, and the Alaska Marine Pilots Association.

The best practices developed by the AWSC will be shared with the U.S. Coast Guard and will be included in their Coast Pilot publication. Mariners traveling through the region will be required to comply with these best practices once established. It is our hope that the formation of the AWSC will help to regulate maritime traffic through U.S. waters and help to reduce risks to our subsistence hunters and marine mammals.

And in an effort to respond to the lack of ports and other transportation infrastructure on the North Slope, North Slope voters approved the

formation of the North Slope Port Authority. Governing the Port Authority will be a board of directors representing multiple local stakeholders. The Port Authority will be tasked with partnering with North Slope entities in the development of port and other transportation infrastructure through public/private partnerships. It is also hoped that the Port Authority will help prepare our coastal villages to respond to potential oil spills or other mishaps at sea.

These represent just two of the initiatives of local people to deal with a changing Arctic. And my message to this Committee is simply this—if our country wants to build upon its status as an Arctic nation, then it should work in partnership with the people who have lived there for thousands of years.

No one has a better appreciation of the importance of the Arctic than the Inupiat. We were the first Arctic nation. Our spiritual connection to the land coupled with our knowledge and experience have enabled us strike the proper balance between protecting the environment and developing our resources throughout our history. We have a keen understanding of both the challenges and opportunities to be found in the Arctic and we are anxious to share our knowledge with federal policy makers so that we can build a strong Arctic nation together.

Quyanaqqak (thank you very much) for the opportunity to address you today.