

**Mayor Itta's Comments**  
**U.S. Senate Commerce Committee Field Hearing**  
**Thursday, August 19, 2010 - 10am**  
**IHC**

Thank you, Mister Chairman. I want to welcome you back to Alaska and the North Slope. You are always welcome here, and we appreciate your efforts on behalf of our people and all Alaskans. I also want to give a warm Arctic welcome to Senator Stabenow [Stay-ben-now]. Even by Alaska standards, Barrow is off the beaten path, so we appreciate your interest in making the journey to hear what the residents of America's Arctic have to say. And during your brief stay, we hope you'll find that our welcome really **is** warm, even if our weather isn't.

I'm grateful for the chance to share a few brief thoughts with you today about issues that concern us and fall under your committee's jurisdiction. Climate change has attracted a lot of interest in recent years, and since the Arctic is the planet's heat sink, this region is kind of like Ground Zero when it comes to the visible effects of a warming climate.

The Arctic Ocean's permanent ice pack is melting away at an unprecedented rate. While this has become a widespread concern only in recent years, it is something that our people have observed for many decades. When you live in a place for as long as we have lived along this coast, and when your survival depends on successfully hunting migratory animals across the tundra and out

among the ice floes, it is not surprising that the Inupiat possess a vast environmental knowledge base. We call it “traditional knowledge.” Scientists who like to reduce things to initials call it “TK.” It is the accumulated understanding about environmental conditions here that has been passed on through the generations for thousands of years.

Some of our elders were aware of the current environmental shift decades ago, long before it became a national concern. They didn’t call it climate change, but they observed how the ice was farther from shore in the fall and thinner in the spring than it had been in the past. The snow cover didn’t last as long on the tundra in spring, and ice cellars were increasingly subject to melting of the permafrost. Erosion was eating away at the edges of our coastal villages. The signs were there, but nobody imagined that this process would accelerate to the extent it has in recent years.

So there is a wealth of historical perspective among our elders and hunters, and the science community is paying more attention to traditional knowledge these days. Researchers acknowledge that TK can inform their work with a longer view and a continuity that comes from the daily encounter that our hunters and elders have had with this environment.

I hope that the federal government will increase its commitment to Arctic research, that researchers will take advantage of the

facilities offered by the Barrow Arctic Science Consortium, and that scientists and local experts will develop closer ties as we all try to understand how climate change is affecting the animals, habitat and humans over time.

\*\*\*

The visible effects of climate change amount to a profound set of impacts on our region. We anticipate **another** set of impacts from offshore oil and gas exploration and development. We would be a lot happier if this activity were happening onshore in ANWR, and we stand ready to speak up if the politics ever begin to look more promising. But offshore seems to have the support of both government and industry. Given that reality, my goal is to make sure that any offshore activity is conducted under the **safest** conditions, with the **best** mitigations and a regulatory framework that recognizes the **unique risks** we must live with. Our culture is anchored in the traditional hunt of bowhead whales along this coast, and when something goes wrong with an oil rig out there, we are the only people whose lives may be drastically affected by the long-term impacts.

This is why I have been promoting a set of offshore policy positions for more than two years now. And I salute our delegation for having sponsored legislation that addresses a number of these positions. The tragedy in the Gulf has created conditions that should

make all of these policies more marketable in the Congress. But I'll be interested to hear your feelings on that.

Quyanaqpak.