



VUNTUT GWITCHIN GOVERNMENT



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THE FIGHT IS FAR FROM OVER: GWICH'IN RESPOND TO U.S. SENATE BUDGET RESOLUTION

(Old Crow, Yukon, Canada – October 20, 2017) Today the U.S. Senate passed budget resolution *H.Con.Res.71* by a vote of 51 to 49 that puts the sacred Calving Grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd situated within the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge at risk. Prior to the Senate budget resolution vote Senator Cantwell (D-Washington) tabled amendment *S.Amdt. 1301* that would have removed the threatening language, but this amendment was defeated by a vote of 52 to 48.

The passage of a Senate budget resolution follows last week's news that the U.S. House of Representatives passed a similar budget resolution. The House and Senate budget resolutions direct Congress to find billions of dollars in new revenues in order to fund President Trump's plans to give tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans. Congress has set their sights on selling the right to drill in the Calving Grounds to Big Oil in order to find these new revenues. However, the latest [analysis](#) from the Center for American Progress estimates that allowing drilling in the Calving Grounds would only raise \$37.5 million over the next 10 years – which amounts to less than 1% of the revenue needed to pay for Trump's proposed tax cuts. It is widely believed this is an effort to buy the vote of Senator Murkowski (R-Alaska) for Trump's tax plan. The Senator is a long-time proponent for drilling in the Refuge and recently voted against Trump's proposal to repeal Obamacare.

While the two budget resolutions are similar, they have a number of crucial differences that must be addressed by the House and Senate before a final Senate vote on a budget bill could occur and become legally binding. Negotiations between the House and Senate are expected to occur over the next few weeks on what the final budget bill will include. While faced with a similar situation in 2005 under the Bush Administration and Republican-controlled Congress, efforts were successful in having the language putting the Calving Grounds at risk removed from the bill prior to the final Senate vote.

Vuntut Gwitchin Government and the Gwich'in Tribal Council vow to continue to fight with their Alaskan Gwich'in relatives, partners and allies to ensure the voice of Gwich'in is heard loud and clear by decision-makers in Washington, D.C. in the following weeks and months.

Quote:

"We are disappointed in the outcome of the vote today but this is only the beginning of a long fight ahead. We are pulling out all the stops now to defend against Congress hijacking the budget process to open the Refuge, and whatever the outcome we remain resolved to take all measures necessary. Our mandate from our Elders is to permanently protect the sacred Calving Grounds on the Coastal Plain of the Refuge, and we will not stop our fight until that is achieved and our human rights are respected." – Chief Bruce Charlie, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

"We understand the issue is complex and there are many perspectives to consider, but in the best interest of the health and well-being of our children and future generations we must stand together like we have all these years to seek wilderness protection of the calving grounds. The potential revenue wouldn't even put a dent in the existing debt and the potential long term risks and negative impacts are just not worth the short term gains. As taught by our generations of genuine elders, there is no price tag on the health of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and ultimately the health of the Gwich'in identity" – Grand Chief Bobbie Jo Greenland-Morgan, Gwich'in Tribal Council

“We call on our partners, friends and allies in Canada and the United States to stand with the people of Old Crow and the entire Gwich’in Nation. We need all the support we can get. Speak with your representatives and let them know that allowing drilling in the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a violation of our human rights.” – Councillor Dana Tizya-Tramm, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

“It is time for every Gwich’in, young and old, to stand up for future generations and the blood of our people that we call *Vadzhaii* (Caribou). For millennia our identity has been inexorably linked to the Porcupine Caribou herd and we consume everything they give us to ensure that our culture and people survive. It is now our turn to do everything we can to ensure the survival of the Porcupine Caribou by protecting their calving grounds and the whole of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge – an unmatched, working, and sustained ecosystem that we call *lizhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit* (The Sacred Place Where Life Begins). The Gwich’in have acted as responsible stewards of the Caribou for thousands of years, and without their survival, we will not survive as well.” – Deputy Grand Chief Jordan Peterson, Gwich’in Tribal Council

Background Facts:

Gwich’in rely on the Porcupine Caribou Herd for their physical, cultural and spiritual survival. Gwich’in Nation homelands span northeast Alaska, Yukon and Northwest Territories and consists of 14 Gwich’in villages and approximately 9000 citizens, including the citizens of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation in Old Crow and Gwich’in Participants of the Gwich’in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement associated with the Gwich’in Communities of Aklavik, Inuvik, Fort McPherson and Tsiigehtchic.

The Porcupine Caribou Herd population is recently estimated at approximately 197,000; up from an estimated 169,000 in 2010. The Porcupine Caribou Herd the largest migratory herd in Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. All other North American barren ground caribou herds have become endangered and vulnerable due to the impacts from industrial activities and climate change, including the Central Arctic Herd to the west of heavy oil and gas activity in Alaska’s Prudhoe Bay.

For nearly 40 years the Calving Grounds have been tentatively protected from Oil and Gas exploration and development by the *Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act*. However, the Calving Grounds have been in a constant state of limbo as an act of U.S. Congress is required to either permanently protect it or open it up to exploitation.

Since given the mandate from our Elders gathered in Arctic Village in 1988, the Gwich’in Nation has successfully resisted multiple attempts by the U.S. Congress to open the Coastal Plain. The Trump Administration and Alaskan congressional delegation have renewed and bolstered these historic attempts.

The majority of Americans are “strongly opposed” to drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. According to [recent public opinion research](#) commissioned by the Center for American Progress, 2/3 of Americans oppose drilling with a majority “strongly opposed.”

Canada and the United States are parties to the *International Porcupine Caribou Agreement* (July 17, 1987) which obligates the parties to coordinate conservation of the migratory Porcupine Caribou Herd.

Canada has domestic constitutional obligations with respect to the rights of Gwich’in and protection and conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd as provided for pursuant to (but not limited to) the *Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement* (1993) and the *Gwich’in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement* (1992).

Both Canada and the United States have international obligations with respect to the rights of Gwich’in and protection and conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd pursuant to (but not limited to) the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966), *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966), *International Porcupine Caribou Agreement* (July 17, 1987) and *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007).

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