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As the opening of bids for the oil lease sale in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) takes place today, January 10th, I would like to express solidarity with the Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation (VGFN) in their opposition to oil drilling in the Arctic.

I am well aware of the global demand for energy, and of the rich resources that Alaska has to offer. However, protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is not just an issue of environmental protection; it is a matter of cultural preservation, sovereignty, and our collective responsibility to safeguard the land that sustains all life, including the Porcupine caribou herd.

The Porcupine caribou, a keystone species in the North, are already facing unprecedented threats. They are the heart of VGFN's way of life and hold profound significance for Indigenous communities in the region. The thought of further industrialization in this fragile region, especially when the Porcupine caribou herd is already at risk, is deeply troubling.

The push to open the Arctic to oil exploration under previous U.S. administrations has for several decades presented a devastating threat to the environment and to the Indigenous peoples who have lived in harmony with the land for thousands of years. Indeed, the intersection of environmental threats with Indigenous rights is one that resonates deeply in both Canada and the United States.

With the incoming new U.S. administration, I look forward to the relationship between our two nations, especially in the Arctic, continuing to be one of mutual respect and shared responsibility for the land, the wildlife, and the people who call it home.

As a Member of Parliament for the Yukon, I stand with the VGFN against this exploitation of our northern wilderness, and in fighting for the future of the caribou and the communities who depend on them.

It is vital that we all recognize what is at stake here: not just the land, but the ways of life and the very cultural identity of the Vuntut Gwich'in and other Indigenous peoples whose lives are interwoven with the rhythms of the Arctic.

In solidarity with VGFN, I hope we can work in partnership towards a future where Indigenous communities are respected and empowered to protect their homelands.

I call on both Canadian and U.S. governments to prioritize the voices of Indigenous peoples, honour their rights, and work toward preserving the Arctic for future generations.

Together, we will continue to fight for the preservation of the Arctic, for the protection of the Porcupine caribou, and for the rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination and environmental stewardship.