

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 3, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

This month, the Department of the Interior released a final supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) for the Willow Master Development Plan (MDP),<sup>1</sup> a massive oil and gas development proposal on public land in the globally significant Western Arctic. We call on your Administration to reject the Willow MDP and select the no-action alternative. No version of the Willow MDP is consistent with your commitments to combat the climate crisis and promote environmental justice, especially as reflected in the Inflation Reduction Act, historic legislation on which we all collaborated to achieve these crucial goals.

If allowed to proceed, the Willow MDP would pose a significant threat to U.S. progress on climate issues. According to some estimates, the Willow MDP could alone cause upwards of \$19.8 billion in climate-related damages.<sup>2</sup> The final SEIS includes a preferred alternative that would defer one drill site and require additional analysis for another, but we fear that the Willow MDP is intended to serve as an infrastructure hub that anchors a decades-long push towards increased drilling in the Western Arctic. Climate damage is unlikely to stop with the first phase of the Willow project; your Administration needs to draw the line now.

Nuiqsut, Alaska, the city closest to the Willow MDP, has repeatedly raised serious concerns about the project's impact on its community. Nuiqsut's population, which is more than 90 percent Inupiat Eskimo, is represented by both the Native Village of Nuiqsut and City of Nuiqsut. The Native Village of Nuiqsut is the federally recognized, elected tribal government of Nuiqsut; the City of Nuiqsut has an elected government that includes a mayor and city council. Throughout the Willow MDP approval process, the City of Nuiqsut has continually shared with decision-makers its concerns. The dual representative bodies have also made clear to your Administration that a final decision allowing ConocoPhillips to pursue its plans for the Willow

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Willow Master Development Plan Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Feb. 1, 2023), <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/109410/570>.

<sup>2</sup> Jenny Rowland-Shea, *5 Reasons the Willow Oil Drilling Project Would Fail To Lower Gas Prices and Only Benefit Big Oil*, Center for American Progress (Nov. 15, 2022), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/5-reasons-the-willow-oil-drilling-project-would-fail-to-lower-gas-prices-and-only-benefit-big-oil/>.

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

March 3, 2023

Page 2

MDP — even one that defers some leasing or development decisions to a later date — cannot meaningfully protect the people of Nuiqsut from environmental justice impacts.<sup>3</sup>

You can stop this ill-conceived and misguided project. The Secretary of the Interior has the authority to select the no-action alternative for this proposal from the list of the alternatives that the Bureau of Land Management considered. As reflected in the final SEIS, any other course of action would detrimentally affect the climate and harm subsistence in the Nuiqsut area. The Secretary of the Interior can prohibit a proposed activity if necessary to mitigate “significantly adverse effects on the surface resources of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska,” where the Willow MDP would be located.<sup>4</sup> We therefore ask your Administration to reject the Willow MDP, choose the no-action alternative, and fundamentally reconsider this unsustainable approach to managing the Western Arctic.

Approving a major new oil and gas development project would be inconsistent with your Administration’s historic achievements on climate and environmental justice. The Department of the Interior should instead initiate a rulemaking proceeding that fully and permanently protects the Nuiqsut region’s designated special areas; aligns the region’s oil and gas production with your Administration’s important greenhouse gas pollution reduction target of 50 percent by 2030;<sup>5</sup> and meets the ecological and subsistence needs of the people of Nuiqsut.

We thank you for your ongoing leadership and for your attention to our urgent request.

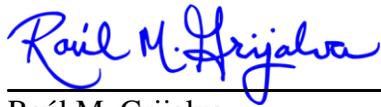
Sincerely,

---

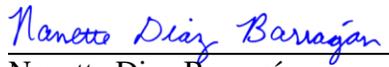
<sup>3</sup>Letter from Eunice Brower, Native Village of Nuiqsut, and Rosemary Ahtuanguaruak, Mayor, City of Nuiqsut (Jan. 25, 2023), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/565291dee4b06ed63ea669d4/t/63d8287ab74e196371bdcf1f/1675110527125/City+of+Nuiqsut+and+NVN+letter+re+Willow.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup>42 U.S.C. § 6506a(b); *see also* 43 C.F.R. § 3135.2(a)(1), (3) (BLM can suspend oil and gas activities on leases if “[i]t is in the interest of conservation of natural resources or if “[i]t mitigates reasonably foreseeable and significantly adverse effects on surface values”); 43 C.F.R. § 3162.3-1(h)(2), (3) (BLM can deny or delay approval of an application for permit to drill).

<sup>5</sup>*FACT SHEET: President Biden Sets 2030 Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Target Aimed at Creating Good-Paying Union Jobs and Securing U.S. Leadership on Clean Energy Technologies*, The White House (Apr. 22, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/22/fact-sheet-president-biden-sets-2030-greenhouse-gas-pollution-reduction-target-aimed-at-creating-good-paying-union-jobs-and-securing-u-s-leadership-on-clean-energy-technologies/>.



Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán  
Member of Congress



Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.  
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress



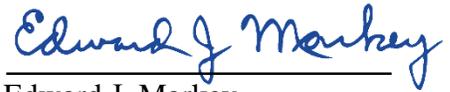
Tammy Duckworth  
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



Diana DeGette  
Member of Congress



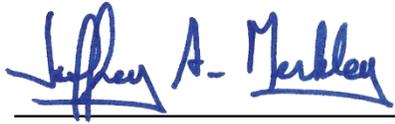
Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress



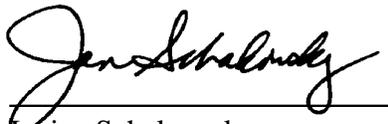
Mike Levin  
Member of Congress



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
Member of Congress



Janice Schakowsky  
Member of Congress



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Gwen S. Moore  
Member of Congress



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



Darren Soto  
Member of Congress



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Debra Haaland, Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior