

Sandra Charlie
Old Crow, YT

Statement transcribed from a community meeting on the Porcupine caribou herd and submitted with consent. Transcribed by Malkolm Boothroyd.

When we live in Old Crow, when we grow up in this lifestyle, and when we're children like Riley and Gavin and Chris, we all grow up with the natural spirituality that we have on this land. We don't know we have it because we never left yet. We never went out of Old Crow to live in the city in the middle of the United States, so we can't we don't know what we've got. But in a while in the early 2000s I used to go down to the states a lot to travel and the Gwich'in Nation has managed to keep no drilling in the Arctic Refuge for more than fifty years. And I tell that to people when I speak to them because I just came from working in Alberta, and when I talk to some of the First Nations there I let them know of the power of their people, because if you go in to Southern Canada there's so many influences from outside resources, companies, stores, that so much of their culture, their close-knit families gets lost in that process. So living in Old Crow we're really fortunate to still have some of that. It's hard to go to the middle of the United States and explain to people who grew up in San Francisco or Washington or Hawaii, well maybe not Hawaii, places in those large cities, it's hard to explain the spiritual connection that's inside our body that we carry every day when we walk on the earth. You can't tell that story to somebody. Living here in Old Crow, if you travel to San Francisco or South Dakota, and you just let your feet touch the earth, you're going to naturally feel what happened on that earth a hundred or so years ago. You can feel the earth, the agony, the crying, the wars, whatever happened there before. When you go to London, England, that's a totally different feeling over there. So, it's in us already as Gwich'in people and we carry it with us everywhere we go no matter where we live. It comes from all our ancestors on our walls, it comes from our grandparents before us, it comes from, like Darius said, when we're in the womb of our mothers. And it guides us when we pass from this earth to the next. And we're really doing that work to keep that for our children, even though they don't really know what it's about right now.

We talk a lot about food security and how sacred food is on earth. And if you don't understand food security try not eating for seven days. And see what that feels like. And think about your great great great great grandchildren and what they're going to go through if they don't have that food security. And how they're going to suffer. And then think about it the same for water. Think about how going without water for seven days and see how your body feels. See how strong you are. And see how weak you are. And relay that to on to your children because we do project a lot of our lifestyle right now onto our children born one hundred years from now. And that's the type of message we carry when we go to the United States. That's the only way they'll understand what we're trying to keep. It's hard to say it any other way. And if you look at how people treat the earth now, and you look at all the resources that are extracted from the earth, all

the pollution put into the rivers and the lakes, and all the stuff in the air that we don't even know about. And I always tell them in the cities, if you put Saran-wrap all over your whole body and you leave the bottom part of your leg out, and you watch your body over the next seven days, look at the part that's covered. Look at how it's breathing, look at how your body's changing, and look at the part of your leg that's left out. That's how the earth feels, because there's so much concrete covering it, production and all that type of stuff going on, extraction of everything.

When you go down to Washington DC and you go inside the Senate or the House, it's not buildings like this. They're massive buildings with marble floors and long hallways. And when you go into an office it's not a little office like VGFN, it's got oak and cabinets and it looks really rich like rich people live there. But all it takes is one disaster and all that means nothing. They wouldn't be able to live. They're going to be drinking out of that fountain in front of the White House with little water on that thing because they're not going to have water. And it's scary — it's not fun to travel all over the United States. You've got to wake up at four in the morning, you've got to get to the airport by six. If you miss a connection you've got to rebook the whole flight. Sometimes you don't have enough money and by the time you've been there for two weeks you're so hungry you can't wait to come back. It's not a fun trip, it's not a vacation, it's a hard-working tiring trip, and you get so exhausted. But we always keep in mind that we're doing this for the children, for a hundred years from now.

And we always keep in mind that our grandfathers, our grandmothers, our ancestors, the animals, they walk behind us, they guide us, they give us the words to speak to people, so we could touch their hearts, so we could influence their votes. And that's what it's all about. And if you really want to go one step further, think about this year. We never had no caribou meat, and we're all hungry. And think about the future, the children way in the future, and if they have no caribou meat, what are they going to eat? And that's basically what this is about. Mahsi cho.