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# The Alaska - Hawaii connection: Part Three

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A relationship too close?

It's understood within the Hawaiian community that Robin and her sister Jade have in the past two years become prominent in the discourse around Hawaiian federal recognition. People take note that their ties to the Inupiat Eskimos come from being a part of that community for many years, that they have relatives, including nieces and nephews, who are of Inupiat ancestry and reside in Barrow, Alaska.

The financial support for the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement from the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation was not unusual all by itself. Different Hawaiian groups maintain cultural and political relationships with numerous American Indian tribes and Alaska Native corporations. So, the money from Arctic Slope Regional Corporation to the Council was seen by most Hawaiians as generosity between Native communities and support for Robin Danner from her friends in the great white north.

What was not made public was the business arrangement between a company called Danner and Associates, with which both Robin and Jade Danner are affiliated, and an Alaska non-profit group called Arctic Power. Arctic Power is a joint lobbying effort that receives millions from the state of Alaska. It is also funded in part by numerous corporations and organizations with interests in Alaska's oil industry, including the Teamsters and oil companies such as Exxon Mobil Corporation.

When asked about her role in Danner and Associates, Robin Danner said, "We have a number of sibling-based initiatives, I am active in real estate." She stated further in an e-mail, "I don't have an ownership interest in it [Danner and Associates], I don't manage it, I've never been paid by it, I've never done any work for it - I can't really tell you much more than that."

However, based on a signed contract between Danner and Associates and Arctic Power, and an invoice signed by Robin Danner, there is a relationship between Robin Danner, Danner and Associates, and Arctic Power that dates back at least to February 2002.

The Gwich'in, the Inupiat, the oil

"My personal position on ANWR is to support the Inupiat People and their right to self determination - WHATEVER it is. For me, it doesn't matter if they oppose or support ANWR or oil. What matters is that their Native voice is important above all others on this one issue." Robin Danner, January 2003.

Inupiat-owned Arctic Slope Regional Corporation owns 5 million acres of land, including the Alpine oil field, which is the tenth largest producing oil field in America. A map of the North Slope shows that millions of acres surrounding the Refuge are dotted by oil producing fields.

Thus far, all drilling has taken place outside of the 5 percent of the Arctic Coastal Plain known as ANWR, which is where the Porcupine Caribou birthing grounds are located. It's estimated that the oil inside the Refuge will take 10 years to deliver and is only enough to sustain U.S. oil consumption for six months.

So, why are the state of Alaska, Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, and multi-national oil corporations lobbying the Congress to grant access for drilling the Refuge? And how did drilling inside a national "Refuge" ever become an option?

The 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), is considered by an overwhelming majority of indigenous peoples in and outside of the U.S. to be the worst Native settlement in modern times. It is also one of the most amended Congressional Acts in the history of the United States. When oil corporations and the state of Alaska realized the substantial wealth and jobs that could be generated from drilling in Prudhoe Bay and the surrounding area, the push was on for a claims settlement. Throughout Alaska, in exchange for extinguishing Native title to 90 percent of their lands, tribes were given what amounted to less than \$3 per acre.

Despite the less than generous terms of the ANCSA, however, the Inupiat Eskimos have been financially successful strategists. They formed the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, and it has paid off. With a rate of growth ahead of the S&P, last year's revenues through oil and other subsidiaries were about \$1.5 billion. Among their subsidiary corporations is one that maintains a contract with the U.S. to supply fuel to the military, another that provides support services for U.S. military radar systems, a company that operates a plastics manufacturer in Guadalajara, Mexico, and a business in Venezuela that watches that country's oil industry.

But ANCSA was not attractive to all of Alaska's Native tribes, and some communities were split; there were no hearings or votes taken at the villages. Of the eight Gwich'in villages on the U.S. side of the border, two opted out of ANCSA and maintained title to their lands, and a traditional subsistence life. And like many federally recognized tribes, the Gwich'in have a tenuous relationship with the U.S. government.

The Inupiat, on the other hand, have a corporate relationship with the state and federal government. In 1983, Department of the Interior Secretary James Watt signed a controversial land exchange with the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation that brought the total acreage of the corporation's contingent subsurface rights in the coastal plain of the Refuge to 92,000 acres.

In spite of the stipulation prohibiting development, unless Congress opens the Refuge, the corporation has already made \$39 million from speculative lease agreements with Chevron, Texaco, and British Petroleum. In fact, within five years of

the 1983 land exchange, efforts were begun in earnest to open the Refuge to drilling. But the Gwich'in people, who live on the south and east border of the Refuge, have put up resistance to every proposal put before Congress and have maintained a grassroots struggle without corporate money.

"If oil companies are allowed access to the Refuge, it would set precedence that any Refuge can be accessed for mining and oil and timber," said Gwich'in spokesperson, Faith Gemmill. From her home in Fairbanks, Gemmill discussed her people's concerns about Arctic Slope Regional Corporation and the State of Alaska's attempts to open the Refuge to drilling.

"When our elders realized the proposed drilling in the Refuge would threaten the Porcupine Caribou calving grounds, they held a traditional gathering [in 1988] and all Gwich'in came to my village - Arctic Village. It was unanimously decided that we cannot allow the oil companies to gain access there. It's sacred; it's the nursery of the caribou. It's where life begins. We humans cannot intrude at that time when they are giving birth and nursing. They need to be left alone and it has to be quiet. The caribou are our family. We made a commitment to protect the caribou and our way of life, and if we are not successful we will perish, too."

Other animals that birth and den in the Refuge include grizzly bears, polar bears, and many different species of birds.

The Inupiat, who own the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, are a coastal people who rely mainly on marine life for their traditional foods; the Porcupine Caribou account for about 10 percent of their diet. But for the Gwich'in, who strategically established their villages along the migratory paths of the Porcupine Caribou herd, the caribou are 70 percent of their food.

"Oil development itself in the process creates heavy metals," said Gemmill.

"Scientists are saying that the productivity of the Central Arctic herd that used to birth near Prudhoe Bay has been impacted." Then, referring to what Rosemary Ahtuanguaruk, Inupiat and Mayor of the City of Nuiqsut, has said publicly, Gemmill added, "Inupiat hunters are reporting that the Arctic herd's meat is now yellow in

color - that's indigenous knowledge."

(Continued in Part Four)