

Mayor's Welcome
NSSI Oversight Group Meeting
NSB Assembly Chambers

1:00 p.m. – Tuesday, June 10, 2008

Mister Chairman (Dick LeFevre who I should say welcome back to), Mister Incoming Chairman (Tom Melius), and members (Ken Taylor, Leslie Howard-Bartels, Cleve Cowles, Dave Yokel, Victor Knox, and Bob Winfree) of the Oversight Group; John Payne, our executive director, and guests: Good afternoon and welcome to Barrow. It makes a lot of sense for a group that has the words “North Slope” in its title to hold meetings in this region, but, I know you all have other commitments and busy schedules, so I want to thank you for coming to Barrow.

We're eager to host science-oriented activities, because more and more it is clear to the people who live here that a broad and extensive scientific record – one that also incorporates traditional knowledge – is crucial to answering the growing list of questions we have about the alarming environmental changes happening around us. Climate change seems to have caught us flat-footed when it comes to really knowing the Arctic scientifically. And for the sake of both environmental *and* development concerns, we need dispassionate science to guide us, and we need it soon.

I am glad to hear that NSSI has been making progress in recent times, between your completed business plan, your continued prioritizing of management questions, data needs and other challenges, and your successful meetings in D.C. I'm also glad to hear that NSSI will concentrate on

questions surrounding the marine environment, where there is so much activity and so much uncertainty.

We're faced with a double whammy, because just as the ice seems to be disappearing faster than ever and some animals are getting stressed and new species are wandering into our waters, all of a sudden the oil industry wants to dive into the Chukchi, and they're bidding billions of dollars just for the chance to explore out there.

It's an unfortunate combination, because I know that science takes time. It's all about monitoring change and unraveling its component parts and coming to an understanding in bits and pieces. On the other hand, industry wants to move now. Their rigs are standing by. Sometimes I think they have more faith than knowledge when it comes to offshore impacts.

And we Inupiat are more than a little nervous about all of this. We want to go at the pace of the scientists; we want knowledge to come first. We don't want to learn by accident or by catastrophe. I tell people that we were here before oil and we'll be here after oil, so we have to take the long view. Our ancestral subsistence culture can't afford big mistakes. We can only tolerate what our subsistence species can withstand.

As you can tell I get pretty worked up on the subject of our offshore concerns, but I don't mean to overlook the very important onshore research you are considering too. And you know, there are still huge data gaps onshore, so I hope you can continue your momentum on those proposals as

well, because whether we're talking about caribou or permafrost or erosion issues, it's all vitally important to us.

Speaking for the Borough, I appreciate our ability to be involved in the work of NSSI. As well as being a member of the Oversight Group, we're fortunate to have two staff members engaged – one with the Science Group and one with the Senior Staff Committee. I've been aware of concerns that they are not being used as effectively as they could be and I hope the Borough can be part of a solution in overcoming any problems in that regard. NSSI is fortunate to have such high-level scientific advisors at its disposal, so I trust we will make the best use of them by engaging and challenging them with suitable tasks.

So let's continue to move forward. We're all in this together and that's why we continue to support the goals of NSSI. We'll help you any way we can. Thank you again for holding the meeting here and we hope you'll come back often.

Quyanaqpak!