

Early in the morning on Monday, December 19, the United States House of Representatives will vote on the Defense Authorization bill, which contains a provision to permit the drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR).

I have taken three opportunities on the floor of the House early today to alert the American people of this back-door approach to passing a very controversial bill, which is desecration of the basic human rights of the [Gwich'in people](#). When will America get off the treadmill of sacrificing native rights to greed, territorial ambitions and fear? We will soon observe a grim anniversary that testifies to our persistent moral dilemma when it comes to those who were here first.

One hundred and fifteen years ago, on December 29, 1890, the US Seventh Cavalry, under the control of Col. James Forsyth, directed artillery fire against Lakota men, women and children. One hundred and fifty Native Americans were killed in what became known as the Massacre at Wounded Knee in South Dakota. US government troops were drawn to the land of the Lakotas to enforce a ban on Ghost Dance Religion, a native mysticism that taught nonviolence and included chanting prayers and dancing through which one could achieve the ecstasy of harmony with the paradise of the natural world.

The dance was forbidden out of fear that excitation of religious passions would turn to Indian violence against the US government. The history of the United States's relationship with our native peoples has been one shame-ridden chapter after another of expropriation, humiliation and deception, theft of lands, theft of natural resources, destruction of sacred sites and massacres. The United States's relationship with our native peoples has been an endless cycle of exploitation and contrition, massacres and apologies.

Who in the future United States will apologize to the descendants of today's Gwich'in tribe, whose humble, natural way of life, religion and culture are threatened with extinction by the plan to drill oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge? The Gwich'in tribe has lived on its ancestral lands for 20,000 years in harmony with the natural world. The drilling for oil in the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge, called by the Gwich'in "the Sacred Place Where All Life Begins," will disrupt caribou calving grounds, leading to the long-term decline not only of the herd but of the tribe that depends upon it for survival.

This will not only violate internationally recognized human rights of the Gwich'in; it will also make a mockery of our founding principles of belief in the inalienable right of each person to "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness." Members of Congress will come to the floor today and say we need to drill to protect our economy, to defend our country, to keep our way of life.

I intend to point to the reciprocal nature of our moral decisions. Christian teaching tells us to do unto others as we would have them do unto ourselves. We learn from other spiritual insights that what we do unto others we actually do to ourselves. We cannot in the consciousness of true American spirit return to a history of slavery, a history where

women had no rights or a history where native peoples are objectified and deprived of their humanity, their culture, their religion, their health, their lives. We must make our stand now not only as to who the Gwich'in are but, in a world where all are interdependent and interconnected, who we are and what we will become based on our decisions today.

When we perpetrate acts of violence, such as drilling in ANWR, we are damaging ourselves as humans. It destroys the land, it destroys the herd, it destroys the Gwitch'in. It destroys us all. Another part of the true America will die. We must not only search for alternative energy. We must search for an alternative way to live. We must escape this cycle of destruction. We must reconcile with nature. We must find a path to peace, with our native brothers and sisters and with ourselves.

One hundred and fifteen years ago, the Ghost Dancers were killed. Yet we still meet their ghosts. They are dancing upon the coastal plains of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.