REMARKS FROM
ASSISTANT SECRETARY DAVID SANDALOW
TO THE ARCTIC COUNCIL
November 17, 1999, 7:30 p.m.

Thank you, Ray, and thank you, ladies and gentlemen. This wonderful opportunity we have tonight to enjoy dinner and this less-formal chance to meet together is the result of a productive partnership between the State Department, the State of Alaska, and the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation. Thanks both to the great state of Alaska, represented here tonight by Lieutenant Governor Fran Ulmer, and to the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, represented by Jayleen Kookesh Araujo.

You have come here this week from countries which span the Arctic Circle, where the length of the day this time of year is short. So while Washington is not known for its illuminating qualities, at least we can provide more daylight! However, we are not able to enjoy the northern lights, which is a very special feature of your longer nights.

To many of you I may be a stranger but, rest assured, I am already a friend. During my five years at the White House on the Council for Environmental Quality, and in my previous work at the EPA, I have worked to preserve our environment and balance human concerns with nature's.

You have had a busy and I hope productive day today, giving shape to the Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Program. You've heard presentations on tele-medicine, youth programs, cultural resources and eco-tourism (presented by Lt. Governor Ulmer just a few hours ago), as well as others on several key health projects this afternoon, all of which show the vitality of the Arctic Council and its ability to address the health, economic, and leadership development needs of Arctic residents.

As you well know, the Arctic region is particularly vulnerable to environmental threats. Scientists expect the Arctic to bear the brunt of two environmental problems: global climate change and contaminants. Both the size and rate of temperature change are expected to be greatest at the Earth's poles, resulting in thinning of the pack ice and altering the habitat of Arctic wildlife. Changes to this fragile ecosystem would have far-reaching consequences to the communities of people indigenous to and living in the region, as well as potentially severe ramifications for the planet as a whole.

Secondly, there are a host of chemical pollutants which seem to accumulate most rapidly in the Arctic region. Persistent Organic Pollutants, PCBs, and heavy metals travel through the upper atmosphere, borne on the jet stream, and collect in the Arctic. The Arctic Council's Monitoring and Assessment Program has and will continue to contribute significantly to our knowledge of this contamination.

But just as science has contributed to the rapid industrial development of the past century, the unanticipated side effects of which have damaged our planet, so scientific knowledge derived from both scientific investigations and traditional and indigenous sources can contribute to

our understanding of how we can solve these problems.

Greater awareness of the fragility - and the inter-connected nature - of Arctic ecosystems helps all of us devise workable solutions to environmental challenges. To give a well-known example, scientists alerted the world years ago to the growing ozone hole over Antarctica, leading to a world-wide moratorium on the production and use of chloroflorocarbons, known as CFCs. Similarly, we must ensure that the policy decisions we make are based on sound science and community involvement as we work to protect the Arctic environment.

But the Arctic Council's goals also include promoting the economic well-being of the region's inhabitants as well as their environment. To some these may seem to be incompatible goals. On the contrary, I believe we can promote both sustainable economic development and environmental protection, through the use of knowledge gained through science and traditional knowledge. Furthermore, these two goals are - and must be - inextricably linked. Both unchecked economic development at the cost of environmental degradation and strict environmental protection at the cost of an impoverished population are empty goals. Rather, each must proceed with an eye to the other, and respect for the other. The central challenge of the Arctic Council is to pursue both its goals simultaneously, neither ignoring the desires of its people for a better tomorrow, nor forgetting the fragility of its environmental beauty.

If you ask most people what they think of the Arctic, they'll tell you about polar bears, ice, and cold. But we know the Arctic region is much, much more. It is an ecosystem, it is a home. It is a place of unparalleled beauty and of great opportunity. We owe it to the people, to the wildlife, and to our future to be wise stewards of this region and ensure that our communities remain viable.

As you continue your essential work tomorrow in the Senior Arctic Officials Meeting and hear the reports of your five working groups, keep in mind the importance to all of us of the work you do. While the far northern regions are sparsely populated, their destiny is our planet's destiny. Enjoy your dinner and the rest of your stay here in Washington, and we'll start preparing and looking forward to next year's ministerial meeting in Alaska. Thank you.