



PRESS RELEASE:

King Cove Residents Outraged that Interior Secretary Ignores Promises to Remote Alaskan Community

King Cove, AK – Feb. 13, 2014 – King Cove Tribal and Community Leaders expressed indignation today, stating U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell is ignoring the needs of the residents she committed to help. On Dec. 23, 2013, Secretary Jewell rejected the land exchange and small gravel road corridor from the remote community of King Cove to the nearby Cold Bay Airport. Earlier this week, Senator Lisa Murkowski sent a letter to Secretary Jewell, requesting that she uphold the promises she made to protect the health and safety of the residents.

“Since Secretary Jewell denied the land exchange and road corridor, we haven’t heard one word from her,” said Della Trumble, spokeswoman for the Agdaagux Tribal Council and the King Cove (Native) Corporation. “We’re offended that no one from the Interior Department has bothered to speak to us. In her press release, the Secretary pledged that she would continue to work with the State of Alaska and local communities to support viable alternatives to ensure continued transportation and infrastructure improvements for the health and safety of King Cove residents. It is even clearer to me that the Dept. of Interior does not take their role in regard to the government mandated trust responsibility to the American Indians and Alaskan natives seriously, as the issue of safe transportation for the people of King Cove continues to be ignored.”

In her letter to Jewell, Senator Murkowski asked the Secretary to provide specific examples of actions taken to fulfill commitments she made since issuing the press release.

“We feel as if she’s ignoring us and her pledge to protect the health and safety of our residents,” said Trumble. “The Interior Department has turned its back on us for nearly 50 years, and it appears this behavior is continuing.”

“We still know that the road corridor is the best and only safe, affordable and reliable option,” said King Cove Mayor Henry Mack. “However, since the Secretary rejected that option, we are counting on her to uphold her pledge to present other alternatives to us, as she promised Senator Murkowski and us when she rejected the road and land exchange. It’s simply unacceptable that there has been no communication from the Interior Department. Don’t our lives matter?”

Since 1981, more than a dozen people have lost their lives, either in plane crashes or because

they couldn't get medical treatment in a timely manner. King Cove is often plagued by gale-force winds and thick fog, creating stormy, dangerous travel conditions, especially during medevac situations. The Aleutian community's gravel airstrip is suitable only for small planes, weather-permitting. The only other option is by boat, and only when the weather allows them to go.

"We have no intentions of giving up on a safe, reliable and affordable transportation option to help us access the outside world," said Aleutians East Borough Mayor Stanley Mack. "We are encouraged that Senator Lisa Murkowski, who has championed this issue, continues to fight for us."

Today, during a meeting with the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Senator Murkowski reiterated her objections to the nomination of Rhea Suh for the Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Murkowski said she doesn't believe Suh has answered questions adequately, including how the Interior Department is fulfilling its commitments to the residents of King Cove.

"There's no excuse for Suh's failure to provide substantive responses to senators' questions 57 times," Senator Murkowski said. "I am resubmitting my questions to nominee Suh, some for the third time, to get the answers the people of Alaska deserve."

"We have no intentions of dropping our critical transportation access issue, even if the Secretary is brushing us off," King Cove Mayor Henry Mack said. "This issue is too important. The lives of our people, our elders and our children are at stake."

For more information, visit <http://www.aleutianseast.org/>.

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