

[alaskasnewsresource.com](https://www.alaskasnewsresource.com)

'We're kind of on our own up here:' Sen. Murkowski on new federal aid for rural villages, Halong recovery

Joe Allgood

4–6 minutes

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (KTUU) - \$20 million in federal aid is being administered to 16 rural Alaskan communities, according to Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski.

\$16 million will go to the Native Village of Chefornak, to “address threats of severe erosion, permafrost loss, and failing infrastructure by relocating at-risk homes, restore damaged wetlands, and reconstruct its barge landing,” according to a statement from Sen. Murkowski.

The other \$4 million will be distributed amongst the communities of Akiak, Ambler, Beaver, Buckland, Gambell, Goodnews Bay, Kiana, Kipnuk, Koyuk, Kongiganak, Kwigillingok, Newtok, Selawik, Shaktoolik and Shungnak, to address immediate needs for supplies like water, fuel and firewood.

“We’ve had so many, so many water systems that have literally collapsed because we had a cold winter,” Murkowski said in an interview. “If we can’t afford to keep the lights on, to keep places warm, our systems fail. So I am very concerned about not only

what we're facing right now, but how long this is going to extend for certain parts of our state.”

Still, with fuel prices still soaring across the country and the state, Murkowski said the aid won't be enough in the long run.

“I wish that I could say that this is going to be a real leg up for these communities, but again, in every one of the communities that have been identified you are already looking at fuel prices that are nearing \$7, \$8 presently,” Murkowski said. “So again, when you see that spring barge come in, you are looking at doubling of those prices. So \$4 million, lots of money to help a good handful of communities. Not enough, certainly. So we have more that can be done.”

Meanwhile, several of those communities are still recovering from damage inflicted by Typhoon Halong, with emergency aid slow to kick in and recovery efforts ongoing

“There are so many different entities that have to come together to work well,” Murkowski said. “Right now, FEMA is not functioning, in my view, as well as we need it to. We're still waiting, years later, for Merbok funds to be released by FEMA.”

This week, Murkowski sat in on [hearings of the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs](#), who heard from a number of different community members affected by the storm, including Thaddeus Tikiun, Chairman of the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP).

“I'm very pleased with what AVCP has been able to put together in terms of a proposal for a Western regional concept,” Murkowski said. “These are the types of forward-leaning, innovative conversations that we need to have, not waiting for the next

disaster, not waiting for the federal government to come in and say, 'well, here's an individual assistance check,' but you've got to move through all these steps."

"We're kind of on our own up here."

Having visited the communities of Kipnuk and Kwigillingok, Murkowski won't be ready for residents to return to in 2026 as the state expected.

"We heard very powerful testimony from Lucy Martin, who is from Kwigillingok, and she said 'We can't go back there the land is not safe.' The land, she said, was like walking on a waterbed, like on Jell-O."

Many of the evacuated residents of the two communities relocated to Anchorage for the time being while their communities are being rebuilt, and now Murkowski said she is concerned about those communities as the school year comes to an end.

"I'm worried about these families who will not have that connectedness that a school and that your kids provide," Murkowski said. "I'm worried about the challenges with just feeling separated and what that's going to mean from a mental health, a behavioral health issue."

Both villages have voted to relocate, but Murkowski said federal regulations are complicating the matter. She said the process should be as self-determined by the residents as possible.

"They have made a very difficult decision that relocation is the path that they want to pursue. That's hard. They know it," Murkowski said. "They know it won't be easy, and so how we move forward with that is going to be important. Do I think it's helpful for the

legislature to pass resolutions recognizing the decision of the people who have been impacted? Yes.”

“But what I don’t want us to be in a place is where it is viewed that the state is telling this tribal community what to do.”

See a spelling or grammar error? Report it to web@ktuu.com

Copyright 2026 KTUU. All rights reserved.