

**Testimony in Support of the Izembek Land Exchange Resolution
Before the Alaska State House Resources Committee
Senator Lisa Murkowski
March 10, 2014 at 6:30 PM ET**

Chairman Feige and Chairman Saddler, thank you for scheduling this hearing on House Joint Resolution 30, the Izembek Land Exchange Resolution. I also want to thank Representative Herron for the invitation to testify today and for his leadership on this issue.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak about an egregious example of federal overreach in Alaska. As I made clear when I addressed the Legislature in February, I have made the reversal of this stunning injustice a major priority.

On December 23rd of last year, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell announced her decision to reject a lifesaving, limited-use, one-lane gravel road through a miniscule fraction of the Izembek refuge. We all know that was a terrible decision – not just wrong, but callous and cold-hearted. We know her decision deprived King Cove of its best and safest option for emergency medical access to Cold Bay. We also know that the people of King Cove remain in peril. And we know that because on Valentine's Day, we saw a frightening medical evacuation by helicopter of a patient who was in very serious condition. If not for the heroics of the Coast Guard, I hesitate to think what might have happened.

But Secretary Jewell said no. She has prioritized the alleged peace and comfort of birds over the safety and well-being of the residents of King Cove. And she has decided that it is acceptable to continue risking the lives of Coast Guard pilots and crews who must brave treacherous conditions to conduct medevacs.

I have written to Secretary Jewell on three separate occasions since her decision, but have yet to receive any response. Most notably, on February 11th I asked her to follow through on the promises she made when rejecting the road. Yet neither she, nor her Department or agencies, have transmitted a single idea so far. Not one employee at Interior has done one thing to improve this situation.

The worst news is that help is not on the way, unless we make the case so strong it becomes unavoidable. That's our task now. The people of King Cove have been deserted by their own federal government, and fear they will not be able to reach medical care should they need it. We can see in this decision what the federal government thinks of the people of the West, and how blithely willing it is to impose federal land restrictions that impact our lives. And we can see that this Administration, in particular, believes Alaska must be protected from Alaskans.

The deck is stacked against us in this fight. And that's why I welcome your resolution. It will be genuinely useful to my efforts to right this wrong. It will help bring attention to Secretary Jewell's decision. It will help affirm that Alaskans are united in our opposition to it – and that we are united in our desire to protect the health and safety of those who live in King Cove.

We must continue to send a clear message that we will not accept the status-quo when the lives of Alaskans are at risk. So I thank you again for drafting this resolution. I thank you for considering it here today. And I strongly urge every member of the Legislature to support its passage.