



United States Senate Committee on
Energy & Natural Resources



Senator Lisa Murkowski, Alaska, *Ranking Member*

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Murkowski's Opening Statement on Nomination of Sally Jewell to Lead DOI

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, today made the following opening statement at the hearing on Sally Jewell's nomination to be the next Interior Secretary.

“Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Jewell, I'd like to thank you for your willingness to serve – and for being here to present your views. I believe many of us have a lot of questions to ask, so I will get right to the point.

“For the past several weeks, much of my time has been focused on a decision that came out of the Department's Fish and Wildlife Service that has rattled me to the core. That agency somehow found cause to oppose a single-lane, 10-mile gravel road for non-commercial use that would connect King Cove, Alaska to the all-weather airport at Cold Bay. The reason we need that road is simple: safety of human life, which is at risk. That road would give anyone who is injured or ill a much better chance of surviving, especially when the weather is far more severe than anything this region saw yesterday.

“Ms. Jewell, we discussed this issue in person last week, so I will not devote much more of my time to it today. What I will say is that this issue should never reach your desk, should you be confirmed. Secretary Salazar has stated that he has a moral obligation to uphold the trust responsibility for American Indians and Alaska Natives. And I note that in your written statement you provide that one of your top priorities is to upholding the sacred trust responsibilities to Native American and Alaska Native communities. Respect for the Aleuts must be balanced with respect for the refuge. It's my expectation that Secretary Salazar will instead look into his heart, make the right decision, and allow the land exchange and the road to proceed.

“Until that happens, King Cove will stand as a prime example of federal overreach and the harm it causes. And the reality is, nearly all of us – especially in Western states – have our own King Cove. We are all aware of instances where misguided federal restrictions are making it harder for local people to live, be safe, and to prosper. We can all relate examples of a lack of balance in the Department's policies that should further, but too often ignore, its mission to honor multiple uses of public lands.

“I anticipate that you will hear two main sets of concerns expressed today. The first is with regard to your experience. It’s good that you have a background in energy development, but more recently, you have focused on conservation. You have less experience and less familiarity with public lands policy than many past nominees for this position. And some of the issues where you have weighed in – including the ‘Wild Lands’ initiative – are unsettling to many.

“As a result, you need to convince us that you will maintain balance in the various missions and interests of the Department of the Interior. We are looking for you to demonstrate an understanding of the issues facing our States, and again, we are looking for your strong commitment to the tenet of multiple use. We need you to affirm that public lands provide not just a playground for recreational enthusiasts, but also paychecks for countless energy producers, miners, loggers, and ranchers.

“The second set of concerns you may hear is based on a broader discontent with Interior Department, itself. Despite tremendous resources on federal lands, nearly all gains in energy production have occurred on State and private lands. Notices-to-lessees have replaced real offshore regulation, and federal fracking proposals threaten to reverse the good work that states are doing. We rank dead last in the world in permitting mining projects. And to again turn to my home state of Alaska, for every issue where we hope to make progress – for example, on wood bison and sea otters – there are others where the Department fails to hear us. The pressing need to clean up legacy wells in NPR-A and land conveyances that were due decades ago are some of the first examples that come to my mind.

“Ms. Jewell, I look forward to hearing more about your vision for the Department of the Interior. And Mr. Chairman, I’ll conclude by noting that I look forward to working with you to consider many additional nominations, at both Interior and the Department of Energy, in the months ahead.”

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