

LISA MURKOWSKI
ALASKA

COMMITTEES:
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
RANKING MEMBER
APPROPRIATIONS
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR,
AND PENSIONS
INDIAN AFFAIRS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0203
(202) 224-6665
(202) 224-5301 FAX

July 23, 2014

510 L STREET, SUITE 600
ANCHORAGE, AK 99501-1956
(907) 271-3735

101 12TH AVENUE, ROOM 329
FAIRBANKS, AK 99701-6278
(907) 456-0233

800 GLACIER AVENUE, SUITE 101
JUNEAU, AK 99801
(907) 586-7277

805 FRONTAGE ROAD, SUITE 105
KENAI, AK 99611-9104
(907) 283-5808

1900 FIRST AVENUE, SUITE 225
KETCHIKAN, AK 99901-6059
(907) 225-6880

851 EAST WESTPOINT DRIVE, SUITE 307
WASILLA, AK 99654-7142
(907) 376-7665

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW, Room 7229
Washington, DC 20240-0002

Dear Secretary Jewell:

Seven months have now passed since you rejected a life-saving road for the people of King Cove, Alaska. I write today to direct your attention back to this crucial matter and to ask that you take meaningful action to protect the health and safety of local residents. To prompt your renewed engagement, I am making several specific requests, including that you schedule a return trip to King Cove.

As you are likely aware, the months since your decision have held no small amount of disappointment, frustration, and anguish for those who live in King Cove. Throughout that time, both local leaders and Alaska's elected officials have repeatedly sought to convince you to reassess your position and to fulfill your promises to this remote community. Unfortunately, the record shows that you have not sought to resolve the very real risks that residents face, and instead have done little to nothing to actually help them:

- On December 23, 2013 – the day before Christmas Eve – you rejected the life-saving road that King Cove has sought for decades.
- On January 16, 2014, King Cove leaders requested that you reconsider the Record of Decision through which you rejected the life-saving road. It is my understanding that you have failed to respond, in any form, to their request.
- On January 17, 2014, I also requested that you reconsider the Record of Decision through which you rejected the life-saving road. You have failed to respond to me, in any form.
- On February 4, 2014, during a nominations hearing held by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Assistant Secretary Rhea Suh was unable to name a single effort underway at the Interior Department to help the people of King Cove.
- On February 11, 2014, I sent a letter to remind you of your promises to King Cove, including your explicit recognition of the need to provide the community with “reliable methods of medical transport.” I included several questions for you to answer about the Interior Department’s efforts, but you have again failed to respond, in any form.
- On March 26, 2014, one day after residents of King Cove traveled to Washington, DC to meet with you, you attempted to shift the burden of responsibility back to them. In an

appearance before the Senate Appropriations Committee, you told us that, “We need suggestions from the people that live in the area on what alternatives would be potentially viable to them.” You said this despite pledging to help identify those alternatives on your own, and despite King Cove’s abundantly clear preference for a life-saving road.

- During that same hearing, you noted that the Interior Department had or was scheduled to have “conversations” with the U.S. Coast Guard and the Army Corps of Engineers about potential solutions that will provide emergency medical access. Yet nearly four months later, no legitimate solutions have emerged from those apparent conversations.
- In response to a question from Senator Mark Begich, you specifically committed to respond to King Cove’s letter of January 16, 2014, seeking reconsideration of your Record of Decision. Yet, more than six months after you received that letter and nearly four months after publicly agreeing to respond to it, you still have not issued any public response.
- On March 31, 2014, the Coast Guard conducted its fifth medevac from King Cove this year alone. Yet again the brave men and women of the Coast Guard risked their lives to rescue stranded residents.
- On April 2, 2014, I wrote you a fourth letter about King Cove, explaining the costs that would be associated with the establishment of a permanent Coast Guard air base at Cold Bay – which are much higher than the costs of building a short, one-lane, gravel road. I also explained that a permanent base would continue to needlessly place our Guardsmen and women in harm’s way. While this is the one alternative you have mentioned in public, you appear to have since dropped consideration of it. You have also failed to reply to my correspondence about it.
- On April 15, 2014, at your request, King Cove leaders provided you with additional information explaining why there are no viable alternatives to a life-saving road. You publicly committed to responding to this information, yet more than three full months after receiving it, you still have not issued any public response.

This accumulating record is deeply disappointing, to say the least. I believe you have had more than sufficient time to answer the letters and inquiries you have received, both from me and from others. You have been presented with evidence that should compel you to reopen and reevaluate the Record of Decision, yet you have not. You have also had more than enough time to identify, evaluate, and propose alternative solutions, but have not. Instead, you have made no discernible effort to resolve this life-and-death threat.

In light of your ongoing failure to protect the health and safety of those who live in King Cove, and because this matter remains just as serious today as it was last December, I hereby make four requests:

First, I ask that you prioritize full responses to all correspondence that you have received on the King Cove road. You have had at least three months to answer each of the letters listed above, and often far longer, which should be more than sufficient.

Second, I ask that you release a public summary of the Interior Department's efforts to re-evaluate the need for a life-saving road and to identify feasible alternatives to it. Please include the dates those efforts were undertaken and the individuals in charge of them. To the extent you believe you have identified suitable alternatives, I ask that your report compare their projected costs and effectiveness to that of the 11-mile road corridor approved by Congress and signed into law by President Obama.

Third, I ask that you set a return trip to King Cove. A second visit is necessary so that you can explain in person why you rejected the long-sought road, and so that you can explain whether help is truly on the way. I will commit to traveling with you, on the day or days of your choice, and ask that you advise me of your availability by the end of this month.

Finally, if you are unwilling to return to King Cove, I ask again that you please explain how – and when – you plan to help those who live there. This is a matter of life and death for nearly 1,000 Alaskans, and I ask that you begin to treat it accordingly.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator