



**Opening Statement
Full Committee Legislative Hearing
Chairman Lisa Murkowski
September 22, 2016**

Good morning, everyone. The committee will come to order, as we begin our legislative hearing to consider 21 measures that are broadly focused on public lands, natural hazards, conservation, and monument designations.

I am the sponsor of six of the bills on today's agenda, so I will cut right to the chase, and speak to each of them.

My Second Division Memorial Modification Act will authorize three new benches for the memorial in President's Park on the National Mall. Those benches will honor soldiers from the Army's Second Infantry Division who were killed in the Cold War in Korea, the War in Iraq, and the War in Afghanistan.

As we consider this bill this morning, I want to say a special hello to Aves Thompson and all who are streaming this hearing from the Second Infantry Division's reunion in Missouri. Know that I am going to be working hard to get this through before you all come to Washington, DC next September to celebrate the Second Infantry Division's 100th year of active service to our nation.

Next up is my National Volcano Early Monitoring System Act. Few realize this, but the United States has 169 active volcanoes, including many in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest. Establishing a national watch office will help us monitor, warn, and protect millions of Americans from the dangers and impacts of their eruptions.

Third is my Alaska Native Claims Settlement Improvement Act, which includes a series of adjustments to help communities throughout Alaska. ANCSA was always meant to be a living law – and, 45 years after its passage, we have a range of issues that demand our attention. Whether land conveyances that still have not been completed, or land allotments for Alaska Natives who are veterans of the Vietnam War, this bill deserves the Senate's timely approval.

Now, in terms of timely approval, perhaps nothing is more important than my King Cove Road Land Exchange Act, which would provide a life-saving road for this isolated community. The Interior Department had a chance to do the right thing back in December 2013, but refused. And

since then, King Cove has endured 52 more medevacs, including 17 carried out by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Last week, on the Senate floor, I shared the story of a Native elder, in her 70s, who recently came into King Cove's small medical clinic with a broken hip. She was forced to wait 40 hours for the fog to lift before flights could resume and she could be medevaced to Anchorage. All of that pain, all of that suffering, could have been avoided if this community had a short, gravel, one-lane, non-commercial road to connect it to nearby Cold Bay.

We have the opportunity to do the right thing to approve this life saving road. King Cove is not included in my Alaska Economic Development and Access to Resources Act, because it is a matter of life-and-death, not economics. But I have also introduced legislation that will unlock Alaska's federal areas and allow responsible oil, gas, mineral, and timber production to proceed. Right now we are facing a brick wall of bureaucratic opposition in each of those areas, and it is having a devastating impact on communities across our state.

My economic development package will facilitate production in the NPR-A, the non-wilderness portion of ANWR, and our offshore Arctic. That will refill our Trans-Alaska Pipeline, reduce our state's budget crisis, and fulfill the promises made to Alaska at statehood – just as it creates tens of thousands of new jobs, bolsters our competitiveness, and protects our national security.

At its core, my economic development package is a measure to ensure that Alaska is not just a resource-rich state, but also a resource-producing state, especially when it comes to our federal lands and waters.

I would remind the committee: that was our deal in Alaska. When President Carter signed ANILCA into law in 1980, he promised that “A hundred percent of the offshore areas and 95 percent of the potentially productive oil and mineral areas will be available for exploration or for drilling” in Alaska. Today, that promise has been turned on its head – it seems like 100 percent of our offshore areas are effectively closed, and only about five percent of our onshore areas are actually open. That cannot be allowed to stand, and my legislation is the way to change course.

The economic development package will also resolve a difficult situation that has emerged in Southeast Alaska. The Alaska Mental Health Trust has a responsibility to use its lands to raise revenues to provide care across the state. The timber industry needs trees to harvest to stay alive, so the Trust has announced that it will hold two timber sales near Ketchikan and Petersburg where logging is widely opposed—and the Trust says it has no other choice.

While the Trust may not have a choice, we do – in the form of my language to expedite a land exchange that the Trust and the Forest Service have already agreed to in concept. This is evidenced by an agreement to initiate that was executed last year, and its assumption in the proposed Tongass Land Management Plan.

This is our chance to reach an agreement to help the Trust, to help our small timber industry, and to address the concerns of the residents in these communities. If the Administration is serious about a successful transition to young growth, my bill will help ensure it.

Finally, one of the main topics of today's hearing will be monument designations, an area where this Administration has repeatedly pushed its authority. It seems like we read about a new designation every week, that's probably an exaggeration, but it just seems like that. The Antiquities Act was a response to an existential threat that Congress could not respond to in a timely manner – the theft of, and from, archeological sites. That is why designations under it were supposed to cover the smallest area possible, not the largest.

Not all presidents have found it necessary to call upon this authority, although presidents from both parties have done so, and some have used their authority to diminish the size of a previous designation. But in this Administration, however, the Antiquities Act has been wielded as a tool to both sidestep and threaten Congress.

What needs to be recognized is that monument designations have an impact on local communities. What needs to be recognized is that “public comments” cannot only come from supportive organizations. We need to rethink, and reform, how monument designations can be made. And that is why I have introduced my Improved National Monument Designation Process Act, which requires both local consultation and congressional approval.

While we may hear other perspectives here today, I am proud to speak on behalf of the vast majority of Alaskans when I say that these bills are critical to our economy and to our future. They will honor our fallen military heroes, protect us from natural hazards, open up new economic opportunities, and restore balance between Congress and the executive branch.

I already have roughly 70 statements for the record to add to our hearing record, and ask unanimous consent that they be included in it.

Ranking Member Cantwell, I will now turn to you for any opening comments you may wish to make.

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