

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 13, 2013

The Honorable Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500-0005

Dear Mr. President:

I write to register the extreme disappointment and frustration I expressed directly with Interior Secretary Ken Salazar over the recent decision to ignore the life and safety needs of my constituents in the small rural community of King Cove, Alaska. Last week, the Fish and Wildlife Service recommended against construction of a short road providing King Cove residents access to an airport in case of life-threatening emergencies.

I am especially frustrated by the process which led to this misguided decision. In one of my first votes as a U.S. Senator in 2009, Congress approved a land exchange to accommodate a single-lane gravel road through just 206 acres of the 315,000-acre Izembek National Wildlife Refuge to provide access to the commercial airport in Cold Bay 25 miles away. As part of the approved land exchange, the community and the State of Alaska were willing to add an additional 60,000 acres to the refuge. Yet, during the years-long EIS process, despite repeated attempts, the residents of King Cove were denied an opportunity to meet face-to-face with Secretary Salazar to make their case. This is simply unacceptable.

I am troubled that this decision is part of a continuing trend to ignore the needs of Americans who live in the West, especially in some of the most remote parts of our nation such as Alaska. Life is especially challenging in these communities where the nearest hospital is an expensive airplane, boat or snow machine ride away. Yet these Americans deserve the same opportunities for basic health care and public safety as those who live in Chicago or elsewhere in our country. While the habitat values of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge are indisputable, the residents of King Cove have taken good care of this area for generations.

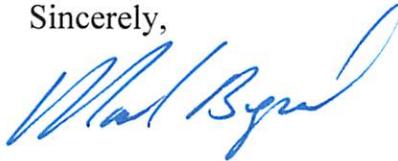
The Honorable Barack Obama
February 13, 2013
Page 2

How she addresses this troubling trend will be at the top of my list when I consider the confirmation of Interior Secretary-designee Sally Jewell. The Department of the Interior has more responsibility in my state than any other federal agency. So, I make two specific requests of you:

- As I already have requested of Secretary Salazar, please ensure that he meets with King Cove residents before he departs as secretary;
- Please direct Secretary-designee Jewell, if she is confirmed, to visit Alaska within her first 60 days on the job to see first-hand the challenges faced by residents of my state.

Thank you for your prompt attention to these important concerns.

Sincerely,



Mark Begich
United States Senator