

When we think we are not making a difference, all we need to do is look to measures such as this WRDA bill.

I commend my colleague for working with me, working with Senator SULIVAN, including many of the priorities we had tried to advance on behalf of the good people of Alaska.

KING COVE, ALASKA

Ms. MURKOWSKI. As we consider their bill—and I am pleased we have moved forward with this managers' amendment—I wish to speak to an amendment that is not part of a managers' package, and it is not an amendment I will call up and ask for consideration, but it is an issue I have presented to Members on the floor in the past. I wanted to take just a few minutes this evening to bring about, again, discussion about another community, a community in Alaska, a community that is in crisis.

We have heard a lot about communities in crisis—whether it is Flint, MI, whether it is those communities that have suffered the flooding in Louisiana, but I have a community in Alaska—a little, small community of less than 1,000 people—by the name of King Cove.

King Cove remains at risk, not because of flooding, not because of a failed water system but because of a decision that was made by our own government, a heartless decision made by the Federal Government. King Cove's problem is not contamination in its drinking water supply, it is something far more fundamental, and it is something that virtually all of our communities—whether you are in Colorado or California—take for granted. What the people in King Cove are asking for is a very simple road, a reliable access to medical emergency transportation. They simply want to be able to reach proper care in time in the event of an injury or an illness.

So for those who aren't familiar with the small community of King Cove, it is a remote fishing community. It is about 625 air miles southwest of Anchorage. It is near the Alaska Peninsula. Eighty-five percent of the residents there are Alaska Natives. Many are Aleut and members of the federally recognized Agdaagux Tribe. As we have so many communities in the State of Alaska—in fact, 80 percent of our communities are not connected by road, but King Cove can only be reached by boat or by airplane. Often that is a challenge. The community is kind of nestled in this spit of land and is surrounded on one side by ocean and on the other by high volcanic oceans.

This is an area that isn't known for its weather. It is very high winds, huge storms, and dense fog all the way down to the ground. King Cove does have a gravel airstrip it can access, and the small planes that fly in and out regularly grapple with low visibility and very strong turbulence that comes down off the mountains, forces the

planes down. You have gale-force crosswinds. It is not a place for beginner pilots. I shouldn't even say that because it makes it sound too light. These are very serious flying conditions, but that is how you get in and out.

I did mention it is accessible by boat, but if it is stormy in the air, it is also stormy on the water. Local mariners are facing the same conditions, plus you add in 12-foot to 14-foot seas to contend with.

Most of the time you are saying: I am not going to travel when the weather is that foul, but there are times when you have to travel, when a medical emergency occurs that is beyond the capacity or the capability of the local clinic there. Keep in mind, this is a very small clinic. You don't have a doctor that can just get in a car and provide services. We don't have a doctor there. We have a physician's assistant. We may have doctors come occasionally, but you don't have the medical care you need. If you have severe trauma or if you are a woman in labor, if you have any kind of a serious illness, King Cove Clinic just simply cannot provide the level of service and care you need.

So what do you do? The first step is to transport those who are sick and injured to the nearby community of Cold Bay. Cold Bay is host to a 10,000-foot-long all-weather runway. It is one of the longest runways we have in the State. It was built after World War II. It is almost always open because they don't get the same weather conditions. Here is the beauty of it. It is only 30 miles from where you are in King Cove. So really, the challenge here, for people who need to get out quickly, is not getting from Cold Bay to Anchorage—the 625 air miles—but from King Cove to Cold Bay, 30 miles. That is the toughest part of the journey there.

Having seen this firsthand, I know that for the people who live in King Cove—the Natives who live there—the best answer, really the only answer, is to do what virtually every other community would do, which is build this short connector road.

Keep in mind, we are talking about a distance of 30 miles between the two communities. But it is not even 30 miles I am talking about. What we are seeking is a short—about 10 to 11 miles—gravel, one-lane, noncommercial-use road. That is what we are talking about. That is all that is needed to connect two existing roads. There is one that runs out of King Cove and another that runs out of Cold Bay. We need to link these two communities to finally and fully protect the health and safety of nearly 1,000 Alaskans. What we need is a 10-mile, one-lane, gravel, noncommercial-use road.

One might say: Well, do it. Why haven't you built the road? The reason is we cannot secure permission from our own Federal Government because—and here is the catch—it would cross a small sliver of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge that was designated back in the 1980s as Federal wilderness.

They failed to consult with the Native people who were in King Cove at the time, but that designation was put in place. So we have been working through this for a period of years—actually, a period of decades.

We thought we had this resolved back in 2009. We overwhelmingly passed a lands bill through this Chamber that was signed into law by this President, and it gave the Department of the Interior the ability to approve a road for King Cove. It was a land exchange. And, quite honestly, it was an unbelievable deal. Alaskans offered a roughly 300-to-1 land exchange—a 300-to-1 land exchange—in the Federal Government's favor.

The people of King Cove said: We need 206 acres for a road corridor, and we, along with the State of Alaska, are willing to exchange 61,000 acres of our State lands and of our Native lands. Let me repeat that. They were willing to give back to the Federal Government the lands that were conveyed to the Natives upon settlement of their Native land claims so they could get a small 206-acre corridor. So between the Native lands and the State lands, a 300-to-1 land exchange was offered up—a pretty sweet deal.

Against all odds, the Secretary of the Interior rejected that offer. She did this on the day before Christmas Eve back in 2013. I think she was hoping that no one was going to pay attention. She decided against cherry-stemming these 206 acres—which, keep in mind, is about 0.07 percent of the refuge—because she said that somebody needs to speak up for the birds. Someone needs to speak up and represent the waterfowl. And she decided that protecting the people of King Cove while expanding the Izembek Refuge by tens of thousands of acres was somehow just not worth it.

To this day, years later, I still struggle with how she could come to that decision. It was a horrible decision. It was cruel. It was coldhearted against the Alaskan Native people of King Cove who care deeply about these lands and have stewarded them for thousands of years.

It was baffling. It is not as if there are no roads in this area. Since World War II, we have had roads in this area. The birds have flown. They have used it as their feeding site. It is not as if this is this protected, pristine area. The Fish and Wildlife Service brags on its Web site that local waterfowl hunting is world famous and spectacular. Come on out. If you want to be a sportsman, come out and go hunt on the refuge here. But you can't have this 10-mile, one-lane, gravel, noncommercial-use road there because someone has to watch out for the birds.

The decision reflects a double standard when you think about refuges in other parts of the country. We have roads through our refuges throughout the country, whether in Florida, Maryland, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Arizona, Montana, Missouri, Illinois,

New Mexico, Nevada, or Washington State. So this would not be the first time you would have a small, narrow road through a refuge area.

It is also ignorant. It is ignorant of the fact that human lives have been lost in King Cove as medevacs were attempted in bad weather. We have had a total of 19 people who have died since 1980, either in plane crashes or because they didn't last before they could be taken out.

The decision of the Department of the Interior was cynical. It was callous. It devastated the people of King Cove, who finally thought help was on the way. It shattered the trust responsibility the Federal Government is supposed to have to our Native people, and it has left these people in the same situation they have been in for decades now. They are at the mercy of the elements. They have the potential to suffer needless pain, perhaps even death, if they should have a medical emergency.

People have said to me: Well, LISA, there are lots of places in Alaska where it is really tough to get in and out of, where weather shuts you down and you are not connected by a road. So why is King Cove so different, so special? It is not that they are so different or so special; it is that there is an easier answer that is right there. In many of the communities, there is not an easier answer. Again, we are talking about a small connector road that could be the answer here.

It has been nearly 1,000 days since Secretary Jewell decided just to wash her hands of this issue. She promised the local residents she was going to figure out a way to help them gain reliable transportation to Cold Bay. Instead of working toward a real solution, she has decided to run the clock out. We have seen no engagement with local residents, no budget request, no administrative action, just one topical study of alternatives. And this alternative is one that has been examined before and rejected before as unworkable.

As chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I held an oversight hearing earlier this year, and the Presiding Officer had an opportunity to hear from the residents of King Cove, to hear what they have gone through, the anguish this has caused their community. We heard about King Cove's decades-long fight for a lifesaving road from its mayor and from its spokeswoman of the Agdaagux Tribe. We heard strong support for the road from Alaska's Lieutenant Governor, a member of the Democratic Party and an Alaskan Native. We also heard from a representative of the National Congress of American Indians.

We also heard some really unsettling things. We heard about the Valium dispenser at the local medical clinic, where many of the residents who have such anxiety and stress about flying—because of the hazards of flying out of this little strip—are given two pills out

of these dispensaries, one for the flight out of King Cove and one for when they return.

We also heard from a retired Coast Guard commander who led a mission to locate a plane crash that killed four individuals, including a fisherman who was being medevaced out because of an amputated foot. The commander told us about the horror of finding these bodies still upright, belted into their seats, with limbs that were frozen and could not be untangled—a memory you just don't ever forget.

King Cove has now had a total of 51 more medevacs—51 more medevacs—since Secretary Jewell's decision in December of 2013 when she rejected this road. Our U.S. Coast Guard has carried out 17 of those medevacs, risking their own crews to rescue those in need. We thank them for that, though that is not the Coast Guard's mission. But they are there when you call them.

Those patients who have been medevaced have been individuals in terrible pain and trauma. One man had dislocated both hips when a 600-pound crab pot fell on him. We have had elderly residents with internal bleeding or sepsis or apparent heart attacks. We had an infant baby boy who was struggling to breathe.

Just this past month—we think: Oh, summertime, August, good weather. This was a bad month for King Cove. No fewer than four medevacs have been carried out. One was an elderly woman who arrived at the medical clinic with a hip fracture. She needed to be medevaced to Anchorage but had to wait for more than 40 hours because the heavy fog on the ground would not lift.

So that is what is happening in King Cove without a lifesaving road. And I know, Mr. President, that King Cove, AK, is a long way from where we are here. Many in this Chamber—most in this Chamber—will never go there. Most people in America will not ever go there. But as remote as they are, as small as this community is, I would remind my colleagues this is still an American community. These are Americans. These are people who deserve to have our help, and it is our job to assist them. They are not asking for much.

We should not let this continue. The people of King Cove are suffering, and it is entirely within our power to protect them. My amendment, and what I have offered in legislation and in amendments, is an opportunity, after decades of waiting and delay and frustration and pain, to finally authorize a short, one-lane, gravel, noncommercial-use road.

As I mentioned, I am not going to be raising my amendment to a vote on the WRDA bill, but I do want the Senate to understand it is well past time to help the good people of King Cove. We need to ensure they have reliable access to emergency medical transportation, and we need to do it this year so that we can put an end to the dangers, an end to the anxiety, an end to the suffering

this community is enduring because of a decision by our own Federal Government.

With that, Mr. President, I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DAINES). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONSTITUTION WEEK

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, for the last 229 years, one document has shaped our system of government and embodied the character of our country. It has guided us through crisis and promoted our national ideals of equal justice, limited government, and the rule of law.

I speak, of course, of the U.S. Constitution. More than two centuries ago, the Founders met to write it in the same Pennsylvania State House, now called Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was signed and where George Washington received his commission as commander of the Continental Army.

The Constitution was drafted in 1787 and signed in that year on September 17. That is why this coming week of September 17 to the 23 is Constitution Week, a time we set aside to commemorate this revered document.

During Constitution Week, we teach the history of our Constitution and of America's promise of liberty for all to the younger generations. One organization that has taken the lead in helping young Kentuckians learn about the Constitution is the Bryan Station chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution. Located in Lexington, the Bryan Station NSDAR will reach out to several schools in the area to help students understand the historical significance of our guiding document.

They will work to educate students of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. They will show them how the Constitution lays the foundation for our country's heritage of liberty. And they will encourage students to study the historical events which led to the drafting of the Constitution and its signing on September 17, 1787.

So in commemoration of Constitution Week 2016, I want to commend the Bryan Station NSDAR for their commitment to civic participation and civic education in the Commonwealth. I want to recognize all the students, teachers, and community leaders in Kentucky and across the Nation who are working to spread an understanding of the Constitution and the ideals it symbolizes.

I also want to especially recognize and thank the men and women in uniform who swear an oath to defend our