Trump a billion dollars for, of all things, a ballroom. Now, let's be perfectly clear, I have no problem investing in our great Capital City or its infrastructure. I was the top Democrat on the legislative branch appropriations subcommittee when we provided funding to restore this Capitol's dome.

We are the greatest Nation on Earth, and our physical infrastructure should reflect that. So if you want to clean up the parks or turn on the fountains or restore the monuments, count me in. But that is not what this is. This is not a normal beautification project in the District. This is a President who is about to turn 80 and nearing the end of his political career, and all he can think about is building monuments to himself.

Other leaders in this position might be thinking about their legacy in policy terms, but not this President. He is single-mindedly focused on building ballrooms and arches and golf courses, while the rest of the country struggles to put food on the table or to even see a doctor.

The ballroom started out in Trump's own words as ''taxpayer free.'' I will fund it, he said, I am not going to ask the government for money. A year later, he has realized that he needs government money, taxpayer money. And because the administration lost a court case on the basis that this project was never authorized by Congress, they are now looking for any statute that they can use to defend themselves in the future.

This is a priority for one person and one person only, and I know my colleagues are in a very tough spot because it is their President. They agree with him about a bunch of stuff, and it is really important to him. But I can tell you, I have not met a Republican Senator who likes this idea. I have met lots of them who are going to vote for it anyway.

Why are we spending a billion dollars on a ballroom when gas is at $4.53 nationally and $5.64 in Hawaii? What possible justification is there for, on the one hand, ending subsidies that help 22 million Americans to afford healthcare and then turning around and bankrolling a new building just so Donald Trump can throw fancy parties for his rich friends?

And that sounds like something that I am making up, but that is literally what this is. It is a billion-dollar ballroom so he can throw fancy parties for his rich friends. People in Hawaii and all across the country are struggling just to get by. Grocery prices are rising at the fastest rate in years because Trump's war in Iran is driving up shipping and fertilizer costs.

Electricity bills continue to outpace inflation with no end in sight, leaving 1 in 3 Americans struggling to pay their utility bills. More than 900 hospitals, nursing homes, and other facilities are at risk or have already reduced services or shut down altogether because Republicans gutted healthcare last year; and because of those very same cuts, 1 in 5 Americans who used to get their healthcare through the ACA Marketplace no longer have coverage.

Millions of others are paying thousands more for the same plan. We could be working to solve any of those issues, but we are not.

Now, here is the thing, the way this weird place works is that in order to enact most statutes, you need a combination of Democrats and Republicans. You need 60 votes. However, there is this weird thing called reconciliation where basically twice a year, if it is budgetary, if it adds to the deficit or it reduces the deficit, so spending counts, you get to do something without the other party.

The majority party basically gets to ignore the minority and pass what it wants. And so when we were in power, we used this unique tool to reduce the cost of prescription medicine. We enacted a corporate minimum tax. We took climate action. We gave people cash benefits so they could survive during COVID.

Look, you can argue about what we did or how we did it. That is fine. That is fair. But it certainly reflected the priorities of the day. But given the chance to do the same, you get these two kind of golden tickets where you get to ignore us, you would think that when you are passing major legislation, one of your two big opportunities, that it would address the cost of healthcare or the cost of fuel or the cost of food or the cost of prescription medicine or the cost of gasoline. But they are using this golden ticket, this twice-a-year opportunity to increase funding for ICE at nearly four times their normal levels and give the President a ballroom.

People are struggling everywhere in red States and blue States, but there is not a dime for you in the bill they are about to pass tomorrow, and it is not by accident.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alaska.

DISASTER RELIEF

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, earlier this month, when I was back home in Alaska, I had an opportunity to have a two-part field hearing in my role as the chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. What the committee was seeking to do was to examine the impacts of ex-typhoon Halong. This was a major, major storm that devastated much of western Alaska back in October of 2025. The committee looked to explore the various Federal responses, the mitigation efforts, but also recovery programs that are available for Tribal communities.

As I begin my comments today, I want to acknowledge the ever-present reality of the environmental threats to our coastal western Alaska villages. This has been a problem, a challenge for us for some period of time.

It was 22 years ago that I sat at a different field hearing in Anchorage. It was convened by Senator Ted Stevens at the time. He was, I believe, chairing the Commerce Committee. We heard testimony about the erosion and the flooding that was affecting coastal Alaska Native villages. Even then—22, 23 years ago—Senator Stevens and I heard about the challenges that were faced by these typically very small, very rural communities in our State. Even back then, many of these communities were considering relocation. It was from that initial field hearing that it was identified, the many threatened communities—threatened by erosion, threatened by permafrost thaw.

So I think it is important to try to understand why we have so many Alaska villages that face this threat. In part, they are in Alaska. We are an Arctic State. We are a State that is seeing the impact of warming more dramatically than any other place in the country. We are also a big, big State. But it also goes back to the way that many Tribal communities were established across the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. We refer to this as the Y-K Delta.

The Native people of that region are largely Yup'ik and Cup'ik people. They were historically nomadic people, and they moved with the seasons. They basically followed the subsistence resource, whether it was the game, whether it was the fish. But when the fall came, which is the time when we see stronger storms, storm surges, they would often move onto higher ground to avoid the worst of the storms' effects.

But history moves forward, and following the purchase of Alaska from Russia and in line with the assimilationist policies of the time, the Bureau of Indian Affairs began to build schools, and this caused families to settle then around the schools. But the settlement locations were not chosen following good feasibility studies or a good, robust cost-benefit analysis. They didn't navigate environmental reviews or work through a lengthy permitting process, nor were they developed in conversation, in consultation with surrounding Native communities whose traditional knowledge about the land may have helped them avoid some ecological hazards.

Then, with the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act; the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, ANILCA; the National Environmental Policy Act, NEPA; and so many of the other laws regarding land ownership and the environment, what we saw were the Yup'ik and the Cup'ik people were largely unable to relocate as they historically might have. As such, over time, many of these small Alaska Native villages have experienced more and greater natural disasters, and some of them have been extremely devastating.

This is where I would like to speak about ex-typhoon Halong. It is now 7 months after this typhoon hit western Alaska, but that 7 months has not

dulled the terror of that storm, which is still present with so many. The storm crossed over 100,000 square miles. This is an area roughly the size of Colorado. The people in the region—again, primarily along the coast, very exposed—experienced winds exceeding 100 miles an hour and flooding, a storm surge pushing the floodwaters up to 25 miles inland from the coast.

So you think you are safe when you are inland but not so much when we have these extraordinary, extraordinary storm surges.

There are two villages that were devastated—the Native villages of Kipnuk and Kwigillingok. The damage there to homes and community facilities was so great that the residents had to be evacuated. They were taken either to Bethel or to Anchorage. When I say ''evacuated,'' they were evacuated by the hundreds in the belly of a C–130 that came in and landed in a mass evacuation of these small villages. There are pictures of hundreds—of hundreds—of Native families who are sitting on the floor of a C–130 and flying to safety because their villages had literally been swept away.

I think it is important to keep in mind that Bethel, you know, is 150 miles from Kipnuk; Anchorage, 500 miles. So they are being evacuated from their villages to, in Bethel's case, a hub village, but it is still far away.

When I say these villages were damaged, it was 90 percent of Kipnuk's community infrastructure that was destroyed or rendered entirely unusable.

I was able to go into Kipnuk with several of the military leadership within less than a week after the storm hit. It was eerily quiet. Really, the only sounds that one heard was an occasional dog that was barking, because the people, when they were evacuated, were not allowed to take their animals. It was devastation like something I had not ever seen.

Kipnuk is a boardwalk community, which means it is built on tundra-type land where the land is very wet, very marshy, very spongy, so there are no roads. You drive a four-wheeler along a boardwalk, and you walk around the boardwalk.

The boardwalks had been lifted up and just tangled and tossed, driven into the sides of homes. Homes had been lifted up off of their foundations and had floated—not just floated a couple of feet but floated miles away. Think about what this does when it rips up boardwalks and when it lifts homes off of their very foundations. The communities' water source—gone. The boardwalks, which are their main roads—torn up, impassable. Again, homes were lifted up, ripped off their pilings, and drifted miles away.

This all happened so quickly in the dark of night in October that most people were still in their homes. They hadn't been able to get the word to go to the school, where it may have been safer. These people were in their homes.

Sewage lagoons were breached and failed. They spilled massive amounts of human waste across the local environment, including across many of the key subsistence areas. Then, in the cemeteries, where the remains of their families are interred, the caskets began floating free in the waters.

It is hard to describe the devastation. It is hard to describe even though, as we flew into Kipnuk, you could see across the wide, vacant tundra a random house catawampus over there. I could see small, white oblongs in the tundra that I couldn't recognize. It was only after I landed that I learned that those were caskets that had floated out and were now littered across the tundra.

So 7 months beyond that event, people are still talking about the devastation to their communities.

For those who were evacuated to Anchorage, adapting to life in our State's largest city has also posed its own challenges. As I have said, the people who were evacuated are now safe from the storm, but they are facing other threats that are equally challenging.

Right after the event, I was there—again, it was about a week afterward—and I went to visit the two congregate sheltering sites there in Anchorage to visit the evacuees. I went up to one little girl—she was probably about 6 years old or so—and she was coloring. I went over to say hello, and she was supersweet.

I said: What picture are you drawing?

She showed me, and it was her house.

She said: This is me and my family in my house.

Then she kind of hugged my leg, and she said: Are you afraid of the dark?

I said: No, I am not afraid of the dark. Are you afraid of the dark?

She said: I didn't used to be, but now I am.

I think about that little girl—and that storm is long gone—and the trauma that she shared, because I later learned that hers was one of the families that were drifting for hours in the dark, where their house was spinning around in the current until it slammed into something that ultimately stopped it. So that trauma for that 6-year-old—I don't know how that goes away.

Anchorage is nearly 500 miles away and over 240 times bigger than Kipnuk and Kwigillingok. Kipnuk may be 800 people on a good day. That is probably being generous with the numbers. But Anchorage is an urban place. It is English-dominated. It is close to mountainous terrain. Everything is different from what these people know in their villages. It is impractical to live a subsistence lifestyle in Anchorage.

Just a very quick case in point: Spring is the time of year when Native people who live out in these tundra villages will go out and gather eggs—seagull eggs, goose eggs. It is part of the spring harvest that just brings great delight to them and to their families.

So when I was visiting with some at this hearing that we had a few weeks back, I said: What is the hardest thing about being here in Anchorage?

They said: We can't get subsistence food. Right now, we should be gathering eggs.

I turned to my team and said: There ought to be a way that even in a big city, you can have a subsistence harvest.

Long story short: I was able to deliver 280 seagull eggs that had been collected off the top of tall buildings—not in the way that it is harvested, but they were given then to the elders of these villages who had been evacuated, with the permission of our Federal resource Agencies. But it was just one small thing that makes me think: We can try to put you in a safe place, but when everything else around you is foreign, it still becomes hard.

The language barrier is a challenge. Accessing most social services in Anchorage requires at least a passing knowledge of English. For many of our conversations at our field hearing, we had interpreters who were translating to those who primarily speak Yuqtun. So there are challenges in terms of the gaps we have.

Students have been transferred to local schools in the Anchorage area and to the Bethel schools. They are doing the best they can to adapt to urban life. But culture shock is very real, and we are seeing how it has taken a toll. We have heard that maybe at least one that we have confirmed but possibly two young people have taken their own lives since relocating to Anchorage. Others, we have heard, have fallen victim to substance abuse. Others are becoming homeless and ending up on our streets.

I know there are strong social service organizations like the YKHC, the Southcentral Foundation, the RurAL CAP, the ANTHC, and the Anchorage School District. So, so many are doing their best to provide support to Halong survivors. But the truth is that the systems we have in place to support communities after disasters like ex-typhoon Halong were just simply not built to help relocate communities. They were not built to support evacuated people for long periods of time, nor were they provided with the flexibility to support people for whom English is a second language.

So there were lots of different things that we looked at and said ''These are system failures here, so what do we do?'' because these are Alaskans who need help. From the time of the storm on, it has been my goal to ensure they have the help they need. Our field hearing was yet one more way to ensure people that they are heard and that their issues receive the Federal attention they demand.

So the first part of our hearing was in Anchorage. We heard from elected Tribal leaders and representatives from the Native villages of Kipnuk and Kwigillingok. Sometimes we just call

them Kip and Kwig. Sometimes it is easier to say ''Kip and Kwig.'' But I will tell you, so much of what we heard on that first day was really heartbreaking.

Lucy Martin, who is Kwig's Tribal resilience and planning assistant, described what it meant and what it felt like to be floating along the river in her home after it was detached from its foundation. Again, you are floating in a current. It is dark. There is nothing to see outside except dark. But what she did see were floating caskets of dead relatives going by her window. She said it was like living through a horror movie.

In his recounting of the evening that the storm hit, Kipnuk chief Paul J. Paul just choked up. He had such a hard time describing being in the house with his family, in the dark, trying to be the strong adult, when his young granddaughter, his 6-year-old granddaughter, said: Grandpa—or Upa—can we sing ''Silent Night''?

She wanted to bring some quiet to the horror they were living in as their home floated away.

When I came before this Chamber last year after the storm—directly after it—I knew how resilient the people of Alaska were and how community members—the National Guard, the Coast Guard, everyone—everyone worked tirelessly in preparation, rescue, and recovery efforts. I will tell you, no doubt about it, these communities are resilient, and we saw that on display in our field hearings as leaders recounted their personal traumatic experiences but at the same time advocated for their communities and urged what the path forward should look like for their communities and also for others that may be threatened.

But here we are, 7 months after the storm, and it is clear that evacuees are just kind of in this limbo place. They have clearly expressed their preference to relocate, but they continue to grapple with a Federal response system that can only facilitate their assimilation to a community that they are uncomfortable with, Anchorage or Bethel—it is just not home; it is different—but also a Federal Government that says: We will help you, but you have to return to the site of the tragedy.

So FEMA says: We are there for you, but you relocate where you are. You rebuild where you are. And in this case, it is a site that is now unstable, likely highly, highly contaminated. Lucy Martin, again, she described the ground there as ''like walking on a Jell-O pad.'' She also said it felt like walking on a waterbed. So how do you reestablish a home in an area like that? These should not be the evacuees' only options.

But we know, firsthand in Alaska, how challenging it can be to actually help communities relocate. It was actually the very first bill that I ever got signed into law here in my time in the U.S. Senate, and it was a land exchange that authorized or helped to facilitate the relocation of the Western Alaska community of Newtok. They wanted to relocate because, again, low-lying, marshy, very much on the coast, threatened by just the land around them. And so they had voted to relocate to a new site 9 miles upriver, a new site called Mertarvik. And we introduced the land conveyance bill, the land exchange bill. It was signed into law by President Bush back in 2003.

I wish that I could take credit for all the origins of this, but, quite honestly, they go back to the seventies and the eighties when Newtok community members first became alarmed by the nearby riverine erosion.

But it took until 2019 for the first Newtok residents to actually be able to relocate to Mertarvik. And, to this day, the residents, now relocated, they are dealing with substandard housing, housing that perhaps went up too quick. I am not going to assign blame for it, but the housing is still a challenge. Community facilities that are still—still—not what we would like them to be. It has been painstakingly slow, and that is probably the best way to describe this process.

Relocation also requires local communities to work together and to engage with Federal, State, and regional partners for success. And my view on this whole issue of relocation, as hard as it is, is that we have got to figure out how we can be responsive to community needs, especially if these communities—like Kip and Kwig—have experienced a disaster so destructive that the environment around them has fundamentally changed to the point of being unlivable.

So if relocation is a community's top priority, how do we respect that? How do we ensure that there is a path available for it?

We also need to do a better job supporting all communities that are affected by natural disasters. So the second day of our hearing kind of underscored that. In Bethel, we heard more about ex-Typhoon Halong and about the effects of Typhoon Merbok. This was a 2022 storm that, again, had pretty much ripped through that entire region—through the Bering Strait, all the way down to the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

And in between 2022 and 2025, they had a massive flooding event just this last year. So, again, consecutive disasters that are coming through these regions.

And what we heard on the second day of that field hearing was a lack of rural emergency response infrastructure. There are barriers to accessing FEMA and State assistance, and the fact that there is no coordinating entity at the Federal level for disaster response and relocation efforts.

We have, in the State of Alaska, a regional commission, the Denali Commission. It is well-positioned in Alaska. But truth of the matter is it lacks the funding to address every need associated with relocation. And utilizing the Denali Commission alone would not solve similar issues that are faced by lower 48 communities.

After the field hearing on that same day—it was a long day, but it was an important day—we hosted a listening session for Tribal leaders and their designees. And what I heard was, even in the communities that were not hit by ex-Typhoon Halong or were just hit mildly, the effects of recent disasters and ongoing ecological changes are just dramatic in the region and are stretching into these out years, maybe decades into the future.

We heard, for example, the Native village of Chefornak's Tribal President, Janet Erik. She shared that the community is combating a combination of riverine erosion, permafrost degradation, and overcrowding.

And so Chefornak is not just sitting and waiting. They are pursuing a managed retreat strategy. They are building new homes on higher ground. They are putting them on pilings. They are putting them away from the adjacent river, while they are also working to remediate and remove buildings that are just literally close to falling into the waters there.

In contrast, Kipnuk and Kwigillingok residents did not evacuate from Chefornak in the wake of Halong. Only about 10 homes sustained damage, and the community actually took in several evacuated families.

So I think it shows that when you look at this through the lens of how can we be proactive to put ourselves in a safer situation like they were doing—in the process of doing in Chefornak—it can make a difference.

But even there, in Chefornak, the sewage lagoon, the landfill were washed out, contaminating land where community members pick their berries, gather their greens, and hunt, as well as the waterways where they fish.

And the land has changed. The waters have changed. An entirely new waterway has formed near the land along the road to the airstrip; and their boardwalks are sinking, again, due to the melting permafrost.

So these are realities on the ground for Alaskans living in coastal and riverside communities. It is not a question of if the next typhoon will hit but really a matter of when.

And, Mr. President, I know we all have disasters that impact our States and communities. You come from a State where you see tornados coming through that bring about massive destruction. And I think we have to appreciate what happens in our respective States and the challenges, then, that we all have in responding.

Alaska's challenges, perhaps, are a little bit accentuated because our geography is so—so—massive and our communities are so isolated. When I describe an evacuation, it is not just getting in your car and being able to move to safety. You have to wait for a C–130 to be able to land and do a mass

evacuation of your village in the situation of Kip and Kwig and some of the others.

And we also know that what happens is these communities were in the news, certainly in Alaska when all this was going on—small community, big impact. But we have this tendency to just move from what we are seeing unfolding on our screens to the next disaster that has hit somewhere else. And the people who are living with that trauma and looking at the disaster still in their area, they can't look away. And I can't look away, you know, when arctic typhoons—arctic typhoon. Just think about ''arctic'' in the same space as ''typhoon.'' There were no typhoons when I was growing up in Alaska, regardless of where I was living.

But we are seeing these phenomenons impact us growing more frequent. Mr. President, 50-year floodplain estimates are now being reached in closer to 2 or 3 years, and so it is just hard to move away from the growing reality.

We have got an emergency response manager. He is an extraordinary professional, Bryan Fisher. He has been with the State of Alaska—30-year career in emergency services. And he testified to us in that hearing that out of 198 disasters that he had led the State response to, Typhoon Halong, he said, has been ''by far the most catastrophic.''

We know increased community threats from natural disasters, again, are not just a problem in Western Alaska or in Alaska in general. We have heard the stories from colleagues from North Carolina, from Tennessee, from Georgia who were here to talk about the devastation following Hurricane Helene and the challenges that those communities have faced with Federal disaster relief and recovery.

There were also stories of Tribal communities in Southwest Washington State and Louisiana that face worsening extreme weather events and sea level rise.

So after our field hearing, it is even more clear to me that the systems in place to protect our communities don't work as we need them to.

Going back to my example of Newtok moving to Mertarvik, people want to view that relocation and say ''success, we have relocated a village.'' And I suppose it is if you want to consider the simple idea that the community wanted to move, voted to move, and they have since moved.

But a closer look reveals many difficult, expensive lessons learned along the way. That relocation was a generation-plus in the making. Its great success is now arguably measured in the lives not lost during ex-Typhoon Halong. And I just think about that, and I think that we have got to have a higher bar than that. Success cannot be measured only in terms of life or death. It also must include the dignity afforded to communities that our constituents call home.

So where does this put us? What do we do going forward?

We all need to pay attention, show up for the people we serve and for each other. And in the coming months, my team and I will continue working with Alaska communities, the State, and other Federal Agencies to chart a path forward. And our goal is to establish a more nimble system for the communities facing environmental threats, one that works with them and for them.

So a couple suggestions here: First, I think you need a lead agency. Back in 2004, witnesses from the State of Alaska expressed that this is just too much for the State to take on alone. That was true back in 2004; that is still true. And with the communities threatened across the country, there is a Federal nexus. And we will do better if we can pool experience and lessons learned and work from a centralized vantage point.

Next, we need to take another look at the way that we have siloed community resilience away from disaster response. We need to ensure that all parties are communicating, they are pulling together on infrastructure hardening, predisaster planning and mitigation, disaster response, recovery, and relocation efforts.

And we also need to ensure that these systems are easier to navigate. I hear this all the time. These systems have to be easier to navigate for the communities that—they are strapped for resources. So narrow grants that have to be pieced together—oftentimes over the course of years—are not the most cost-effective way to address the problem, especially for Tribal communities that are already struggling with low capacity.

Right now, Tribal leaders like Janet and her fellow council members in Chefornak, they are being asked to choose between building new homes for families that have moved in with relatives since their old homes were literally leaning into the river or decommissioning and decontaminating old buildings that are also about to fall into the river.

I do want to acknowledge, and we are very grateful for the $16.7 million that the BIA just awarded to Chefornak through the Tribal Community Resilience Program, but this is just a start because those are impossible choices that are facing too many of our communities. It is not just Chefornak.

In the meantime, I promise not to look away and to keep bringing folks up to Alaska to see, to understand, to hear. As conversations continue about the best way to structure our disaster response system, I want to work with colleagues—both sides of the aisle, wherever you are—to address not only the unique needs in my home State, but of all our States and make sure that they are adequately addressed. Our disasters and the response to them may look different. I get that. But our people all deserve the same access to safety and disaster response. And I don't think—we just can't lose sight of that.

I also want to acknowledge Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Billy Kirkland. Assistant Secretary Kirkland and his staff showed up for the people of my State. He sat with me for hours as we heard from the people of Kipnuk and Kwigillingok when we had our field hearing in Anchorage, and then he travelled with me to Bethel as we heard from Tribal leaders across the YK Delta on these very important issues. As we listened, I was struck by some words from Charlotte Nayagak. She is from the Chevak Native Village, and she has worked on disaster recovery and prevention in the region for many years.

She went up to the mic, and she had like 2 minutes to speak, but she started off by saying:

> Finally. Finally someone from out there, not just from Alaska—finally somebody is listening to us. We need this. We need this help.
>
> Finally somebody is listening to us.

So imagine spending decades watching, as Charlotte described, the erosion of your land getting worse and worse each year, happening faster and faster, and just feeling like nobody from outside your community, nobody from outside your State is listening.

We should all be listening. We should all be working together to provide a better future—even after the darkest disasters—for the people we serve no matter where they live. So I look forward to working with all of my colleagues to do just that.

TRIBUTE TO SARAH MCKINNIS

I also want to acknowledge before I close that I have a member of my Indian Affairs team that has been with me now for a couple years. She started off at a very junior level and has worked her way up to a level of trust and responsibility within the committee. She is going off to pursue dreams of higher education in significant institutions. She has been a true asset to the committee and to me, and so I want to acknowledge the good work of Sarah on my team and wish her well.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BANKS). The Senator from Tennessee.

MEMORIAL DAY

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, we are looking at Memorial Day weekend and certainly on Monday taking that time to pause and reflect on the brave men and women from Tennessee and, indeed, across the entire country who have made the ultimate sacrifice in defending our freedoms right here.

Tennessee is really so blessed to have a very strong military community. In our State, we have more than 400,000 veterans that call Tennessee home. They, indeed, enrich our communities with their records of service and sacrifice.

We also have several major military installations in our State. There is Fort Campbell, which primarily sits in the State of Tennessee. There is Arnold Engineering Development Center, an