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The Honorable Sally Jewell  
Secretary  
United States Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W., Room 7229  
Washington, D.C. 20240-0002

Secretary Jewell:

I write today to bring your attention to a letter from the United States Coast Guard regarding the establishment of a permanent air station in Cold Bay, Alaska, which you are considering as an alternative to provide emergency medical access to the residents of King Cove. In addition, I wanted to inform you that the Coast Guard carried out yet another emergency medevac from King Cove – its fifth this year alone – in terrible weather conditions on the night of March 31.

While I am grateful for the continued bravery and selflessness of the men and women of the Coast Guard, I am dedicated to ensuring that we do not needlessly expose them to any greater danger than is absolutely necessary. The status quo now risks not only the lives of the residents of King Cove, but also those of our guardsmen and women. This is particularly unacceptable given that the residents of King Cove could have all-weather access to medical care if you choose to allow the construction of a few miles of one-lane gravel road.

When we met last week, you mentioned that you are considering the establishment of a permanent Coast Guard air station in Cold Bay as an alternative to a road. You further stated that you had corresponded with the Coast Guard about this proposal. As I told you at the time, I strongly disagree that it is a viable alternative for a number of reasons.

First, the letter I received from the Coast Guard affirms that a permanent station would be far more expensive than the proposed road that you rejected late last year, on both an upfront and annually-recurring basis. According to the Coast Guard, establishing permanent air station in Cold Bay is estimated to cost \$165.8 million – or roughly eight times what the state of Alaska estimates it would cost to build the road.

Another consideration that I hope you will take into account is that asking the Coast Guard to perform these non-maritime medical transports would put its personnel at risk of not being able to conduct other missions, most notably in the Arctic.

Second, it is important for you to understand that non-maritime medical transports are not a core mission for the Coast Guard. Each time a resident of King Cove requires an emergency medevac, a determination must be made that the response does not interfere with core mission

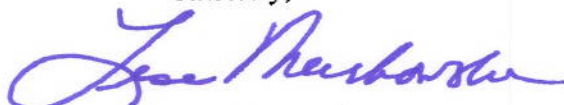
activities. While the Coast Guard is willing to assist whenever it can, these medevacs are a second-tier priority by function of law. In other words, in the event of a conflict between priorities, the people of King Cove will lose.

Finally, I would like to provide you with more details on the most recent medevac from King Cove. The individual transported was a 58-year old fisherman from Seattle, Washington, who sustained a severe eye injury while aboard a fish processor in the Pacific Ocean. The physician assistant in King Cove consulted with an emergency room physician in Anchorage who recommended that the patient receive immediate attention from an ophthalmologist in order to preserve as much of his eyesight as possible. Without a road, the injured man was forced to wait hours before the Coast Guard could arrive and transport him to Cold Bay.

This letter marks my fourth correspondence to you since December 23, 2013, when you rejected the King Cove road. I have not received any official response from you to any of my previous letters. It has now been more than three months since you promised to address the need to protect the people of King Cove. In the interim, we have seen five Coast Guard medevacs, in addition to three other emergency transfers of patients, from that community. We have learned that an approach you are considering makes little fiscal sense, especially compared to a short gravel road, and particularly in this time of budgetary shortfalls and rising debt. We have also learned that it could divert the Coast Guard from its core mission. In other words, while we have been waiting for a response from your department, we have confirmed something the Alaskans who live in King Cove already knew – a one-lane, non-commercial, gravel road is the only option.

I believe this is reason enough for you to reconsider whether a permanent air base is a superior solution for emergency medical access. I instead encourage you to revisit and revoke your decision to reject the lifesaving road for King Cove. The people of King Cove and all Alaskans deserve no less.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senator