

Opening Statement: Re-Hearing of Suh and Schneider Nominations
February 4, 2014
Senator Lisa Murkowski

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your willingness to convene this second nomination hearing for two of the President's nominees for the Department of the Interior. A number of us had concerns and reservations on these particular nominations, which is why we requested this re-hearing. I am hopeful that our hearing today will address, in greater detail, our questions and other issues which have not yet been satisfactorily resolved.

Based upon the record of the prior hearings as well as our meeting, I have serious reservations about not only what I perceive is your lack of knowledge of western lands issues, but also with your unfamiliarity with Alaska's most pressing issues and unique governing statutes. I'm not being overly parochial here as we have over 70 percent of the National Wildlife Refuge System and two-thirds of the National Park System located in Alaska, so when you indicated in our meeting that you were not prepared to discuss any of my State's issues in any detail – that concerns me.

I must also express my dissatisfaction with your answers to many of the questions I submitted for the record at your last hearing. I am eager to hear today your candid views on the development of the Arctic Coastal Plain, the life-saving road I am seeking for King Cove, the potential use of the Land and Water Conservation Fund to address our maintenance backlog, the role of hunting and fishing within our refuges and preserves, subsistence reform in Alaska, and tribal self-governance.

I also want to address generally the leadership of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I firmly believe that agency is heading in the wrong direction and has lost sight of its responsibility to the American people. This problem is most recently highlighted by the Service's role in the fundamentally flawed review process and rejection of the life-saving King Cove road but it is not limited to that single decision. My view is that the Service is simply not considering the impact of its decisions on people across our country. This is a most troubling direction for the agency.

Ms. Schneider, I note that you have received a bipartisan letter from several members of this Committee. I hope you are familiar with the IG report it centers on, and are ready to answer questions about the issues raised within it. I also need to mention Shell's disappointing announcement last week to cancel its exploratory drilling program in the Chukchi Sea this summer. This decision is based on a 9th Circuit ruling that the EIS for Lease Sale 193 is deficient, but also because there is no regulatory certainty or permitting predictability for Arctic development. I'd like a firm commitment from you – from this Administration – that you support the development of the oil and gas resources off Alaska's coast and will work hard to ensure Shell can move forward in 2015, and development can occur in the future.

I will be asking a number of questions this morning and I hope that we will have an open, detailed, and honest dialogue regarding issues of concern to Alaska and all states.

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