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February 9, 2016

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The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

I am extremely disappointed that your administration did not follow through on your commitments to Alaskans and failed to award any funds in the U.S. Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) National Disaster Resilience Competition in Alaska.

In announcing the finalists for the competition HUD Secretary Castro declared that nearly \$819 million was available for select states, including Alaska, and communities. The Secretary specifically noted that "HUD is committed to helping communities meet the realities of climate change and extreme weather."¹ Your trip to Alaska focused on the impacts of a changing climate and in preparation for your visit the White House issued a video entitled: "President Obama's Trip to Alaska: The Frontlines of Our Fight Against Climate Change." At the GLACIER Conference in Anchorage, you used your conversations with Alaskans to illustrate the importance of action: "I recall what one Alaska Native told me at the White House a few years ago. He said, 'Many of our villages are ready to slide off into the waters of Alaska, and in some cases there will be absolutely no hope – we will need to move many villages.'"

That observation was further reinforced when the GLACIER Conference determined:

Climate change is threatening the existence of Arctic communities, contributing to a dramatic increase in coastal erosion and flooding in the American Arctic. Building the resilience of these communities and addressing managed retreat or relocation needs are pressing and time-sensitive matters.

Further,

Innovative housing technologies – suitable to the cultural and environmental context of the Arctic – are needed to address the interconnected goals of health promotion, climate resiliency, energy efficiency and renewable energy integration and affordability.

In recognition of the threats to Alaska Native villages located in the Arctic, you announced your commitment to protect these communities that engage in voluntary relocation or other managed retreat efforts. In an effort to meet this challenge, HUD was called upon to use "cross-

¹ http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/press/press_releases_media_advisories/2015/HUDNo_15-079

agency principles for climate-related relocations ...when using HUD funds for voluntary relocation of communities.”

With your public acknowledgement of the unique challenges to resilience in its rural communities in mind, the State of Alaska submitted four proposals to HUD on behalf of villages much like the ones you alluded to in your remarks:

- The village of Newtok, which has been working to relocate the community due to erosion, proposed funds for building modern housing, a runway, and the basic necessities of life at the new village site Metarvik.
- Emmonak, which is located on the Lower Yukon and suffers from flood damage on a regular basis, proposed expanding basic infrastructure so that they would no longer have to worry about the barge landing being washed out, and being unable to get basic supplies into their community for extended periods of time.
- Teller proposed building a sea wall, elevating the street that abuts the sea, improving the road to the hub community of Nome, a wind energy farm, and water and sewer improvements in response to changing conditions.
- Galena does not have a piped water system and the lack of in-home water service has been found to increase the hospitalization rates for pneumonia (2.5 times the rate of people with water service), influenza (2.5 times the rate), skin or soft tissue infections (1.4 times), and respiratory syncytial virus (3.4 times).² The village proposed building a public shower house, a washeteria, erosion prevention, and building a solar array.

As these projects and your rhetoric recognize, rural Alaskans are on the front line of a changing climate and face real threats to their existence. These villages are small, difficult to access, and construction projects are incredibly expensive in the Arctic. People lack running water, face extraordinary energy costs, substandard housing, and the loss of their traditional way of life, going back some 10,000 years. That rich history infuses these places and as you saw across my state, rural Alaska is filled with innovators improving their communities through investments in renewable energy, innovative partnerships and responses to disasters that in the Lower 48 would dominate the 24 hour news cycle.

Given your public statements, it appears that HUD has not only missed a key opportunity in the Resilience Competition but left rural Alaskans looking like simply a backdrop on your pathway to Paris.

When one compares the obvious need for resiliency efforts in Alaska, which you yourself have pointed out, to many of the states who were awarded funds in the competition, it is difficult to understand Alaska’s complete absence from the list. We understand the population disparities that exist between Alaskan villages, such as Newtok, and regions in the continental U.S. like the Hampton Roads region in Virginia. However, awarding millions of dollars for bioswales, rain gardens, rain barrels, and green infrastructure in those communities and absolutely nothing in Alaska where extreme health and safety issues are rampant is unacceptable.

²Hennessy, Thomas, M.D., Ritter, Troy, MPH, Holman, Robert, MS, et. al. (2008). The Relationship Between In-Home Water Service and the Risk of Respiratory Tract, Skin, and Gastrointestinal Tract Infections Among Rural Alaska Natives. *American Journal of Public Health*: November 2008, Vol. 98, No. 11, pp. 2072-2078.

There is still time to work together. The challenges facing Alaska are not going away, and I am prepared to work and partner with you to affect real change for the people who need it most.

My bill, the Energy Policy Modernization Act of 2016, includes key provisions to support the transition to renewable energy and better homes and buildings in our rural communities. It will inspire innovation and promote resilience by empowering local communities to build local solutions. I greatly appreciate your willingness to work with Congress on this needed legislation. The Denali Commission also offers a prime opportunity to make good on the promises you made during your visit to Alaska. I ask you to increase the Commission's budget in order to enable it to carry out the initiatives you announced. If no other federal agencies are going to keep promises you made to Alaskans, empowering the Commission to help communities with environmental adaptation strategies is one way to achieve your stated goals.

My concern is that your recently released budget is simply aspirational whereas the Resilience Competition was a tangible opportunity to affect real progress. HUD's failure does not have to be the last word you have with Alaskans. It is my sincere hope that you will refocus your administration's efforts and work with me to change the course these communities face.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

Cc: Julian Castro
Secretary of the Department of House and Urban Development

Mark F. Brzezinski
Executive Director of the Arctic Executive Steering Committee

Dr. John P. Holdren
Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy