

[Bethel, Alaska • Aug. 12, 2009]

cakviurnaq
"Having a hard time in the moment"

FORGOTTEN AMERICA

Rural Alaska Problems and Solutions



► **TOSSING OUT THE SLOP:** Myron Lincoln dumps human waste from the family's honey bucket onto the frozen banks of the Ninglick River at the village of Newtok last fall. A large percentage of homes in dozens of rural Alaska villages have never had flush toilets. PHOTO BY ALEX DEMARBAN



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August 5, 2009

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We are honored that you and four other Cabinet Secretaries will be visiting the Calista /Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) Region, known as Alaska's Yukon Kuskokwim Delta, on August 12.

As you know, rural America faces unique challenges and those challenges are amplified by distance and harsh geography in rural Alaska. We are pleased to share the rugged beauty of Alaska's landscapes from the city of Anchorage, to hub communities like the city of Bethel to the remote Alaska villages that populate our region. This special opportunity to hear the diverse voices of our region will inform your perspective on current successes and future needs.

As you conduct listening sessions in our Region to investigate social and economic challenges such as housing, health, infrastructure, energy, green jobs, climate change and the subsistence economy, we ask that you consider the statement of issues and recommendations on the following pages and how your department can serve as an agent for change.

We are eager to discuss the future for rural residents and Native communities—traditional communities that have thrived for thousands of years. There is a lot at stake here. Your visit is the first step toward helping the Obama administration shape public policies that will improve the lives of our people. We welcome you and appreciate your attention.

Camai.

Matthew Nicolai, President
Calista Corporation

Myron Naneng, President
Association of Village Council Presidents

Gene Peltola, President & CEO
Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation

Ron Hoffman, CEO
AVCP Housing Authority

The Recipients:



The Honorable Steven Chu
Secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy



The Honorable Shaun Donovan
Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development



The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education



The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior



The Honorable Tom Vilsack,
Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture



STATEMENT OF ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture



High costs of living impact on regional income, poor salmon runs and competition from international markets on local fisheries, high dependency on government grants, high energy costs, fuel shortages combined with high fuel costs, inadequate transportation and energy infrastructure, and high unemployment are all symptomatic of basic economic and community problems the AVCP/Calista region is faced with today. These present very comprehensive challenges requiring initiatives that involve coordination of efforts between the various service organizations with resources to assist in economic development activities in the region.

Issue 1: Economic Development

Limited income generating opportunities in small remote rural Alaskan villages require regional/sub-regional hub community development strategies for sustainable economic development.

Diversify local economic base by introduction of regional/sub-regional services and industries, enhance local human and technical capacities for business enterprise development.

Recommendation:

- Expand tribal Rural Business Enterprise and Opportunity programs to provide for economic cluster development strategies at regional and sub-regional level.
- Promote small and emerging private business enterprise in coordination with other public/private initiatives such as renewable energy and energy efficiency deployment, and natural resource developments. Expand access to capital financing and credit development.

Issue 2: Energy Needs

High energy costs, fuel shortages, inadequate transportation and energy infrastructure require a comprehensive program strategy. These are common development challenges at all regional and sub-regional levels throughout rural Alaska.

Develop regional/sub-regional cluster strategies that combine energy, transportation and related infrastructure development efforts.

Recommendation:

- Expand tribal Rural Utility Services and tribal Rural Business Development programs to allow for consolidated infrastructure development in regional/sub-regional clusters.

Issue 3: Landfills, Dump Sites and Honey Bucket Disposal

AVCP's member villages are underserved, undeveloped, and lacking basic infrastructure.

Homes lack piped water and sewer. Human waste is still hauled in honey buckets by hand to bunkers. Dump sites do not meet minimum standards for health and safety. Every day, more and more goods are flown into villages. The packaging of these goods never leaves our villages.

Environmental conditions such as permafrost, wetlands, flooding, drainage and dust, are a challenge to waste disposal. This region is the spring nesting and breeding grounds for ducks, black brants, emperor geese, northern pintails, grebes, loons, swans and cranes and is, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the most important shorebird nesting area in the country. Marine mammals include spotted seals, ringed seals, Pacific walrus, Pacific bearded seals, whales and threatened Steller sea lions. The river, ponds and small streams are the habitat of at least 44 species of fish, including all 5 species of Pacific salmon.

Most villages have, at best, a Class 3 unpermitted landfill. Most villages have problems such as accidental, uncontrolled open burning, particulates blowing back over town, the spread of contaminated soil/snow from the tires

and tracks of vehicles entering the dump site, nonburnable items such as old snowmobiles, trucks, and batteries leaking acids and people disposing of hazardous wastes at the dump site. There is no doubt these pollutants are leaching into the surrounding wetland environment.

All villages have unofficial dumpsites and old honey bucket bunkers that need to be cleaned up and rehabilitated. Both in the past and today, ponds are often used as dump sites and waste is dumped indiscriminately into these sites. Dump sites have tons of discarded household items, old trucks, snow-machines, ATVs and scrap metal.

Recommendation:

- Provide adequate funding for each village to develop and implement Solid Waste Management Plans that will plan for the closure and rehabilitation of existing dump sites, develop hazardous waste programs, eliminate honey buckets, and construct new, safe landfills.



Village landfills often sit exposed to the elements, allowing trash to fly free. Flooding can also be a problem when waters polluted by landfills flow past houses.

Issue 4: Indian Reservation Roads Program

AVCP's 56 member tribes reside in small isolated villages scattered throughout an area that is approximately 59,000 square miles and roughly the size of the state of Oregon. The villages are not connected by road to one another, or to the rest of Alaska. AVCP has initiated a regional effort to pool village U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Reservation Roads (IRR), program funds in order to enable villages to coordinate the planning and development of transportation projects, leverage additional funds, and complete desperately needed transportation infrastructure.

The construction of road and boardwalks in the region's villages will improve community health and safety by controlling dust once roads are paved and dirt trails are improved with boardroads (same as boardwalks). As roads and boardroads

are built, access to traditional subsistence resources will be provided, local jobs will be created, and projectemployed village residents will increase their skill levels. Economic development will also occur throughout the region as airports, barge landings, ports, docks, and roads are connected to one another in places where they currently are not. These connections will reduce costs involved in transporting goods and services, including but not limited to those associated with fuel and labor.

Recommendation:

- Provide AVCP a meaningful opportunity to present and discuss our proposed amendments to the Indian Reservation Roads Program regulations set out in Title 23 U.S.C. Section 101(a) and 202(d).
- Amend Title 23 U.S.C. Section 101(a) to add a new paragraph that will more clearly define the areas of land for which Alaska's tribes are eligible for IRR funding. AVCP also proposes to amend Title 23 U.S.C. Section 202(d) which will revise the formula by which IRR funds are appropriated and recognize Alaska village boardroads as an eligible facility.

Issue 5: Relocating Eroding Villages

Every community in the AVCP region is built upon permafrost. The permafrost is melting because of warming air temperatures and a warmer ocean. Sea ice that protects villages is forming later in the year, which allows fall storms to greatly impact the shoreline. Many villages are at or below sea level and sinking.

Recommendation:

- *Fund the relocation of villages. Leaders in the AVCP region believe that the cost of relocating a community has been incorrectly calculated and is far less than the amounts estimated by the federal government. AVCP believes these staggeringly high incorrect projected costs have become a barrier to assisting villages. AVCP will assist villages with developing accurate cost plans for relocation.*

Issue 6: Native American Challenge Demonstration Project Act of 2009

America's Native peoples — American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians — continue to suffer disproportionately high rates of unemployment and poverty, poor health, substandard housing, and associated social ills when compared to any other group in our nation. Although there has been steady improvement, particularly in the area of health, there has been little progress in the last 30 years towards closing the gap between Native peoples and the American public at large in most indicators of well-being. This demonstration project aims to re-invigorate Native economies by building on concepts and principles of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and using a compacting model to channel development funds to locally-designed economic development strategies.

Recommendation:

- *Urge Congress to enact the proposed Native American Challenge Demonstration Project Act of 2009 as part of its efforts to stimulate the economy and revitalize rural areas. As initially proposed, the project would authorize \$100 million over 5 years, for disbursement to a total of 5 pilot projects. One project each should be funded in Alaska and Hawaii and three in the Lower 48 states.*

Issue 7: Subsistence

Subsistence is an integral component of the culture and traditions of the indigenous peoples of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Subsistence also supplements the expensive and limited selection of food available in village grocery stores. In AVCP's region, people consume 664 pounds of subsistence food per capita per year. The high cost of fuel has had a significant impact on the cost of food and there has been an increase in subsistence activities.

Decisions involving management of fish and game often rely on outdated and unreliable information. For example, the Federal Subsistence Board allowed additional animals to be taken based on a study conducted in the 1980's. AVCP believes the data is no longer accurate and cannot be used to make resource management decisions. Methods used by the State of Alaska to document the subsistence harvest are not an effective method as harvest tickets are often not returned or incorrectly completed.

Data collected is sparse and at times unreliable due to mistrust of the agency. There are many other subsistence resources uses that are currently undocumented or poorly researched due to funding limitations and the reluctance of researchers to stay in our communities for an extended period of time. As a result, accurate information is not obtained from the people that harvest the animals, fish, plants, etc.

As subsistence hunters, fishermen, and gatherers suffer as precious resources are allocated to the powerful western economic entities like the sport hunters, sport fishermen, the Bering pollock trawl fishermen, commercial natural herbal medicinal and cosmetics businesses because information is unreliable. The State of Alaska will not fund additional research relating to this matter.

Recommendation:

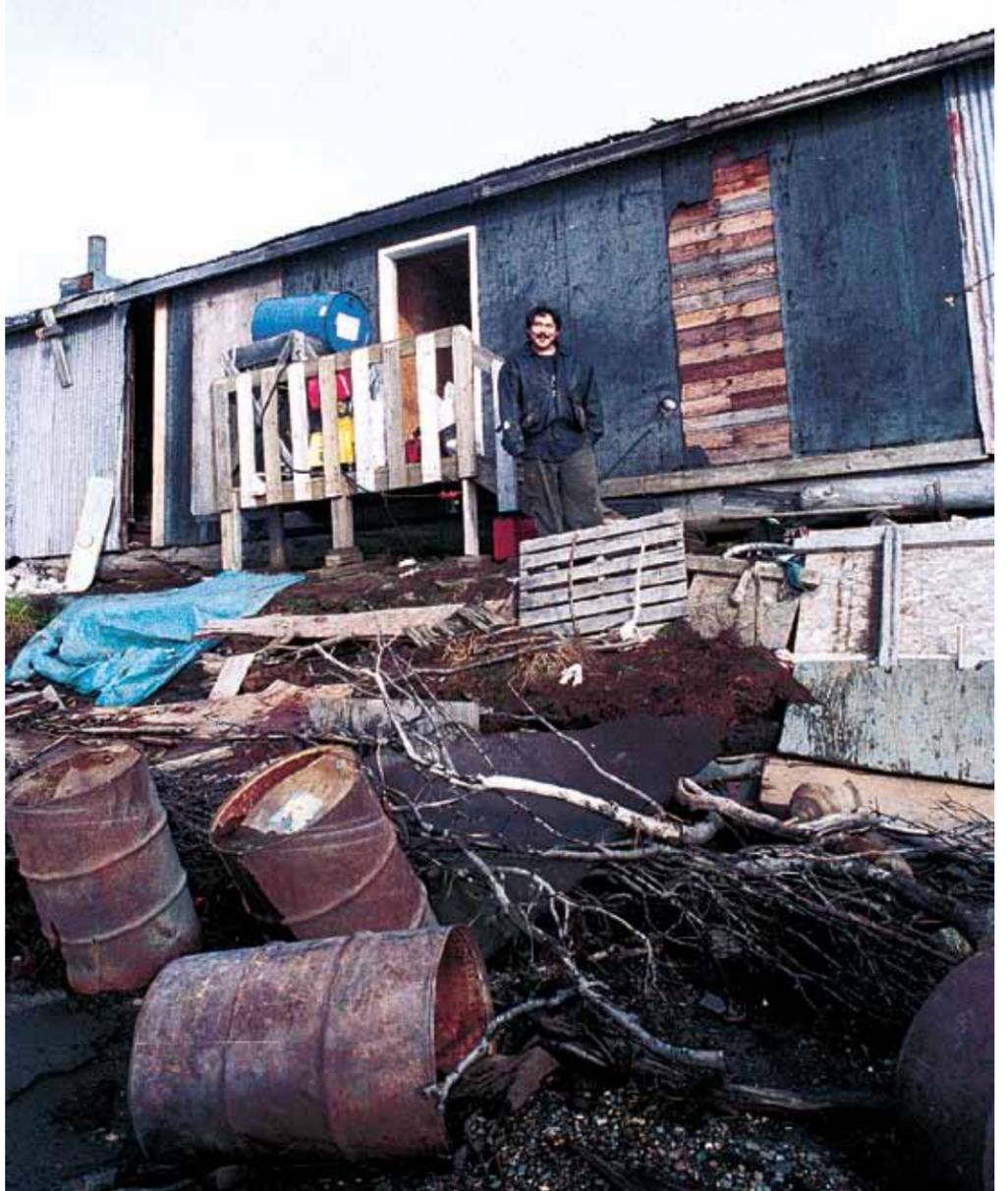
- *Provide AVCP with approximately \$6.5 million to create a Regional Subsistence Resource Research Program that will employ staff in villages and in sub-regions to collect information, record, analyze and interpret data, and develop accurate, substantiated and methodologically sound reports. The program will coordinate, utilize, and disperse scientifically proven information to resource management agencies and other commercial or private interests. Recurring funds will be needed.*

Issue 8: North Pacific Fishery Management Council

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) is one of eight regional councils established by the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act in 1976 (which has been renamed the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act) to oversee management of the nation's fisheries. With jurisdiction over the 900,000 square mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off Alaska, the Council has primary responsibility for groundfish management in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) and Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI), including cod, pollock, flatfish, mackerel, sablefish, and rockfish species harvested mainly by trawlers, hook and line longliners and pot fishermen.

In April 2009, the Council, which consists of government and seafood industry representatives and oversees the massive pollock fishing industry in the Bering Sea, voted to place a cap of 60,000 on the number of salmon that pollock fishermen accidentally kill each year.

While a cap never previously existed, many villagers who have seen years of weak chinook returns to the Yukon River and other river drainages attribute the decline of chinook, a vital subsistence food and one of the few sources of village cash, to the pollock fleet. AVCP's member tribes believe that every fish counts and that a cap of 60,000 is too high, especially when high fuel and food prices during the 2008-2009 winter caused many of our tribal members to struggle to pay for food to feed their families and fuel to heat their homes. Moreover, the Council's 60,000 cap which must still be approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, will not even become effective until 2011.



DANIELLE WOLFE/ALASKA NEWSPAPERS FILE PHOTO

John Prince stands near the porch of his home in Kotlik, which is only two feet from falling into the river. His family has used oil drums, branches and wire to hold back erosion.

Recommendation:

- *Allocate four seats on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to tribal members from rural Western Alaska in order to provide a fair balance and a voice for subsistence users of chinook salmon.*
- *Urge the NPFMC to prioritize and protect the subsistence take of chinook salmon.*

Issue 9: Salmon Bycatch in the Pollock Fishery

Every year, the Bering Sea pollock fishery intercepts chinook and chum salmon bound for Western and Interior Alaska, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. This bycatch is either thrown back into the water—dead after hours in the nets—or saved for donation to food banks. Chinook and chum salmon bycatch in the BSAI pollock fishery rose to record levels in recent years, with over 122,000 chinook salmon taken as bycatch in 2007 and over 700,000 chum salmon in 2005.

These numbers are of particular concern to Western Alaskans as studies of bycatch samples from the late 1990s show that over 56% of the chinook salmon caught as bycatch in the pollock fishery are of Western Alaskan origin, and 34% of those Western Alaskan chinook salmon are Bristol Bay stocks, 40% are Yukon River stocks and 26% are from the Kuskokwim River. The pollock fishery — and salmon bycatch — is managed by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (the Council) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

The Council recently initiated a process to adopt new chinook salmon bycatch management measures, and took final action in April 2009. The Council chose a two-part approach which provides for a 47,591 bycatch level in most years, with the potential for the fleet to reach 60,000 in two out of every seven years without consequence.

The Council's decision places a limit on chinook salmon bycatch in the pollock fishery, which is an important development. However, the hard cap numbers chosen by the Council were well above the 29,000-32,500 hard cap levels requested by groups throughout Western Alaska and recommended by the Federal Subsistence Board and Alaska Board of Fisheries.

The hard cap levels are also above those recommended by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the U.S. Department of State, and the Yukon River Panel. While the hard cap numbers chosen by the Council will eliminate the record high bycatch years of 2005, 2006 and 2007 from occurring again, they will largely maintain bycatch at levels experienced prior to those years and will do little to actively reduce salmon bycatch.

The Council's action depends on industry incentive plans to reduce salmon bycatch below the specified hard cap levels. The plans operate outside of agency and Council control, aside from some basic requirements for the plans and an annual Council review. The industry is not even legally required to submit the same plans presented during the course of the Council's decision. The Council's decision must be reviewed and approved by the Secretary of Commerce. Pending approval by the Secretary, this management measure is scheduled to take effect in January 2011.



The store in Nunam Iqua closed after this photo was taken last summer [ABOVE]. Now, the village has no store, and villagers must travel several miles to the nearest community to shop. High grocery prices at rural stores is common, including at this store in Emmonak [ABOVE RIGHT].



is understood that standards exist and must be achieved, federal programs must also be able to adapt to reflect the needs of the specific community and its circumstances. A formal procedure must be instituted that addresses and remedies these situations.

Recommendation:

- To protect Western Alaska salmon stocks, provide for subsistence needs and the tribes and communities of Western Alaska we urge the Secretary of Commerce to:
 - Reject the Council's approved management action; and
 - Use his emergency regulation authority to implement a hard cap of 32,500, effective immediately.

Issue 10: Barriers in Federal Programs

Native villages have a difficult time submitting and reporting on federal grants electronically. Aging infrastructure, aerial phone lines in a region characterized by pervasive winds, and dial-up Internet connections all make electronic submission of reports and grants very difficult.

Many agencies require online submission of grant proposals. Since the advent of grants.gov, the region has seen a 48% drop in grants submitted. While some federal agencies permit mailing in applications, they must still be received by the deadline.

Issue 12: Adherence to Local Hire Program in Section 1308 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act

Section 1308 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) allows federal land management agencies to hire local residents based upon their specialized knowledge or expertise. The program has provided important employment opportunities throughout Alaska for more than 28 years.

A recent change to the program imposed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) requires the departments of the Interior and Agriculture to utilize a competitive hiring process for filling jobs under the local hire program. This change is inconsistent with both the language and intent of the statute and, if allowed to stand, will result in the loss of job opportunities in areas of the state where such job opportunities are already limited. In some villages, jobs under this program may be the only ones available.

Recommendation:

- Direct OPM to reconsider its position and work with the responsible federal agencies in Alaska to ensure this program continues to benefit Alaskans and federal public lands in this state.

“Subsistence is an integral component of the culture and traditions of the indigenous peoples of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Subsistence also supplements the expensive and limited selection of food available in village grocery stores.”

Such deadlines are virtually impossible to meet when extreme inclement weather restricts air and mail travel. In order to insure an application is received on time, villages need to mail a package at least 3 weeks in advance. If a grant is only open for 6 weeks, this reduces the time in half that a tribe has to develop a project, confirm memorandums of agreement, hold community meetings and complete other tasks.

Recommendation:

- Exempt the tribes in Alaska and allow them to submit grants and reports by mail with a postmark date that is the same as the closing date for all other applicants.

Issue 11: Flexibility in Administering Federal Programs

Federal requirements that make sense in every other part of America are inefficient and ineffective, and cause delays and extra costs in Southwestern rural Alaska. For example, the Native Village of Akiachak was recently funded to construct a desperately needed jail.

Akiachak has a population of 614. The village has a Public Safety Building, but it is in need of repairs. The tribe thought it would be more cost effective to build a new one. The U.S. Department of Justice awarded the tribe \$459,953 in funding to support construction of a new facility. USDOJ then sent a technical assistance team to Akiachak. The team concluded that the jail would need to have 6 cells with showers, toilets and sinks, a dayroom, a kitchenette, a laundry, a booking/release area, a meeting/interview room, at least 1 office, a staff toilet, a janitors closet, storage, and a public lobby and waiting area. In a village where all homes haul water and bathroom waste, this project was transformed by DOJ's technical assistance team into an immense undertaking with a staggering cost; that was far beyond what the tribe had been awarded and that the tribe could not support once completed. The project was defunded. This is one of many such examples.

Recommendation:

- Provide villages flexibility in the administration of federal programs. While it

Issue 13: Critical Research Needs in Western Alaska

The declining salmon stocks in Alaska have imposed hardships on communities, fishermen, and Alaskan Natives who rely on these fish. Information gaps have led to abject failures to predict salmon declines and determine appropriate management responses.

With a consistent source of funds dedicated to research and monitoring of salmon in Western Alaska, we can help address these declines. The time is upon us to prioritize salmon recovery in Alaska and in particular, Western Alaska.

Alaska is the last stronghold of salmon left in the Pacific. Yet, even with our undammed rivers and pristine habitat, we still have Alaskan salmon stocks that are in trouble. We know from experience that it is much more expensive to bring a stock back from the brink than it is to respond to early warning signs.

The Department of the Interior through the Bureau of Indian Affairs has, in the past, identified research funding for Western Alaskan salmon stocks, 1994-2005. The need has not diminished; it has increased tenfold and the attention to this situation must not be earmarked, it must be incorporated into the Department of the Interior's mission and budget.

The likeliest recipient for this funding is the Arctic-Yukon- Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative. The initiative is a partnership between public and nonprofit institution which provide a forum for Native regional organizations and state and federal agencies to cooperatively identify and address salmon research and restoration needs.

Recommendation:

- Establish a reliable source of funds (\$5 million-\$10 million annually) directed to the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative. These funds must be dedicated to western Alaska salmon stocks, designed for the purpose of understanding the trends and causes of variation in salmon abundance to assure sustainable uses of wild salmon for future generations. ■



STATEMENT OF ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR:

The U.S. Department of Education



We have many unique challenges in improving education our schools in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta. As we work to overcome these challenges, we can benefit from support from the state and federal governments. In the past, federal intervention has often provided more obstacles than support. We are grateful for recent changes at both the state and federal levels that are establishing a more collaborative and supportive relationship. We thank the Obama administration for making the effort to listen to rural Americans. We are grateful for the opportunity to be heard.

Concerns with the No Child Left Behind Act:

As educators we welcome the development of content and performance standards and the concept of a system of accountability that have resulted from the NCLB act. We have significant concerns with the way NCLB is structured. The rigid "one size fits all" approach of NCLB does not serve our students well. Many of the NCLB regulations were written to fit a typical American school. We are not typical.

Issue 1: Small Schools

Our schools are small (many have less than 100 K-12 students), so test scores from very small samples result in Adequate Yearly Progress data that is unreliable.

Recommendation:

- Increase the sample size necessary for AYP determination.

Issue 2: Remote Locations

Our schools are geographically isolated (accessible only by air) so quality SES providers are difficult to find, and school choice is not an option.

Recommendation:

- In reauthorizing NCLB, include flexibility for states to exempt small isolated schools from the school choice requirement, and allow the school to be the SES provider, if there are no other providers available who can demonstrate that they meet a standard of effectiveness.

Issue 3: English as a Second Language

Our schools are located in communities where Yup'ik and Cup'ik have been the dominant languages for thousands of years. Many of our communities want their children to be fluent and literate in their heritage language. In most cases, we provide instruction in the heritage language of the students in the primary grades, yet we are required to test in English beginning in the third grade for AYP data. Research, including our own data, tells us that bilingual students typically catch up with monolingual peers in their high school years, yet AYP is based on testing in grades 3-10, and does not include grades 11 and 12. Sometimes developing a stronger foundation delays results in the short term, but ultimately yields greater results in the long term.

Recommendation:

- Base AYP on a "value added" approach vs. 100% compliance. Exempt students from being tested in English until they have had at least 2 years of instruction in English, or allow school districts to demonstrate proficiency in their language of instruction. Give heavier weight to proficiency levels in grades 10-12 in formulas for AYP calculations.

Issue 4: Standardized Testing

Although we continue to improve the quality of standardized tests, most educators recognize that they measure a fairly narrow band of what a holistic education should provide, yet the consequences of "failure" under NCLB are based almost exclusively on standardized test scores in math and reading.

Recommendation:

- Any reauthorization of NCLB needs to broaden the scope of measures of what defines AYP.

Issue 5: Qualified Educators

In our small schools, it is common for one or two teachers to teach all of the secondary courses. Thus far it has been impossible to provide NCLB HQ teachers for all courses. Even if we are able to get most of our teachers HQ by the end of a school year, the next year, with high teacher turnover, and the normal rotation of course offerings necessary in small schools, we start over again with the HQ process. It is interesting to note that in the past two years in LKSD, there has been a reverse correlation between HQ teachers and AYP status. In other words, having a higher percentage of courses taught by HQ teachers appears to make it less likely that the school will make AYP.

While this does not mean that there is truly a cause and effect relationship, it does call into question the reliability of the NCLB regulations in our schools.

It is widely recognized that as important as content knowledge is, there are many other skills and qualities that teachers must possess in order to be successful.

Recommendation:

- Focus HQ designation on a set of skills and knowledge that correlates better with effective teaching.

Other concerns:

Rural Alaskan school districts face many other challenges that are not directly related to NCLB, but affect our ability to meet the requirements of the act.

Issue 6: Equal Readiness

Kindergarten students do not start with equal readiness. Vocabulary tests (PPVT) show that our incoming kindergartners, who have not been in a preschool program, are an average of 2 years behind in vocabulary development in either language. We have been able to secure grant funding to operate a few preschool programs, which result in significant improvement in kindergarten readiness. Unfortunately, without a regular source of funding for preschool programs we cannot make these opportunities consistently available for the majority of our children.

Recommendation:

- Provide consistent funding for preschool for every child.

Issue 7: Teacher Turnover

Rural Alaska schools are faced with extremely high teacher turnover. High turnover has a negative effect on student performance. Research, as well as our own exit survey data, shows a multitude of reasons for teachers leaving. Many of these reasons are inherent in the job, but others can be controlled with adequate resources. One of the major reasons teachers cite for leaving is not having adequate teacher housing. In spite of the millions of dollars invested by rural Alaskan Districts to improve teacher housing, half of rural Alaskan teachers do not have housing with running water and flush toilets, and many are required to share housing with other teachers. Although federal grants



BEVERLY HOFFMAN/ COURTESY PHOTO

Kindergartners Reese Williams, left, and Adam Egoak at the Mikelnguut Elitnaurviat School in Bethel show off reading trophies.



JOHN MCDONALD/COURTESY PHOTO

have recently been made available to assist in this cost, we are still unable to provide enough quality housing.

Recommendation:

- Provide sufficient funding to adequately house all teachers in rural Alaska.

Issue 8: Classroom size

In many rural Alaskan villages increases in enrollments have outstripped our ability to provide sufficient classroom space. Many of our schools are running at more than 200% more students than the buildings were designed for.

Recommendation:

- Provide sufficient funding for school construction.

Issue 9: Technology

Rural Alaskan schools are heavily reliant on technology to provide quality education to our students, because of our geographic isolation. Most rural districts have good technology infrastructure, but we are still reliant on a satellite connection to the outside world, which significantly reduces bandwidth and transmission speed.

Recommendation:

- Provide funding to build a fiber link to Western Alaska.

Issue 10: E-rate Program

The E-rate program has provided good support for building technology infrastructure, but the burden of administering it creates a burden for school districts.

Recommendation:

- Seek ways to streamline the "red tape" and auditing requirements for the E-rate program.

Issue 11: Social Issues

We face many great challenges that all educators face, as well as some that are unique to our region. Lagging attendance rates, declining enrollment, and truancy are just a few. But we also deal with many dark issues that are at the heart of the social fabric of many areas of American society: alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, rape and other issues that detract from our day to day charge of educating the young people of our villages. As you can imagine and already know, it's incredibly difficult (if not impossible) to educate a student that is concentrating on fulfilling basic day-to-day survival needs like food and a warm, safe place to be.

Many of the roots to the problems that we face in rural Alaska can be summed up due to the lack of good paying, sustainable jobs for adults. This

Donna Elliott Bach and students at Bethel's Mikelnguut Elitnaurviat School [ABOVE] enjoy the book "I Know I Can."

has a tremendous impact on our students in that their lives are unstable for schooling if their lives are unstable at home. A general feeling of hopelessness in many of our villages due to no jobs, no money, and no way to support families resonates and drags many of our young folks down.

Recommendation:

- Support ways to provide employment opportunities to help families – not a hand out but a hand up. These types of opportunities could prove that education is important through attaining a diploma and/or training to acquire these jobs would help us as educators in the grander scheme of things.

Issue 12: AVCP Regional Offices & Museum

AVCP's region is the poorest in the State of Alaska and is the eighth poorest nationwide.

Villages are remote and are only accessible only by plane or boat. AVCP provides a variety of social service, human development and culturally relevant programs that build capacity within and empower tribal members, promote tribal self-determination and self-governance, and protect tribal culture and traditions. The high cost of fuel has led to an enormous increase in transportation costs. This is placing an immense strain on families as the price for all food, goods, and heating fuel skyrockets. AVCP's indirect costs are increasing as the cost of fuel increases. As a result, fewer funds go directly to vital programs.

Currently, AVCP's program staff is located in 3 separate buildings. Social service program staff are located in two 2 fully-occupied buildings owned by AVCP. AVCP's Yupiit Piciryarait Museum rents a third small space, which includes all galleries, offices, and storage at an off-site location. AVCP's office buildings are at maximum capacity, as is its museum, and there is no more space to expand. The buildings AVCP owns are old and are in need of costly retrofitting to make them energy efficient. AVCP staff spend work time driving back and forth between buildings, thereby creating administrative inefficiencies and limiting productivity.

Recommendation:

- Provide sufficient funding to construct a new building that will house all of AVCP's programs, including the museum, in one adequate, energy efficient space. A new building will enable AVCP to expand services which will create more jobs and reduce operational costs allowing more federal money to go directly to programs. While AVCP does not have the resources to build a new office building, we do own a vacant parcel of land upon which we can construct a new building.

“In many villages increases in enrollments have outstripped our ability to provide sufficient classroom space. Many of our schools are running at more than 200% more students than the buildings were designed for.”

“Aging infrastructure, aerial phone lines in a region characterized by pervasive winds, and dial-up Internet connections all make electronic submission of reports and grants very difficult.”

Issue 13: Internet Capability & Future Needs Assessment

Throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, home computers are uncommon. Access to the Internet is limited to the school in many villages. There is not a gap or weakness of services, infrastructure and opportunities, there simply are no services or opportunities or infrastructure. Almost every resident of the region has had no opportunity to use computers or access electronic information and the Internet. Powerful technology is changing the way we access information, learn, work and connect to each other.

Technology will significantly alter the economy in our region by enabling people to live in their Native village and receive effective training without relocating their family. Access to online information on health care, nutrition, community planning and finances will increase the quality of life. In order to improve Internet access, AVCP needs to better understand what services are currently available in each village. AVCP must determine whether, if any Internet service exists at all, it is provided by cable, wireless or DSL connections. Currently, AVCP has no way of knowing how to proceed with broadband infrastructure projects because of these unknown factors.

Recommendation:

- Provide adequate funding to conduct a detailed survey of existing village Internet services in order to assess current capabilities and the future needs of every community. From the data collected, AVCP will develop a comprehensive plan for expanding, developing and improving access to the Internet.

Issue 14: Village-Based Business Development

The villages in AVCP's region have the highest unemployment rate, the highest jobless rate and are the poorest in the state of Alaska. Many families are dependent on public assistance for survival.

The unavailability of work, the dependency on public assistance payments and the hopelessness that accompanies such dependency has been linked to a myriad of social problems. High rates of alcohol and substance abuse, suicide, depression, and domestic violence have all been affiliated with chronic unemployment. While the unemployment rate for the state of Alaska is 8.4%, the unemployment rate for the Bethel census area is 17.3% and the unemployment rate for the region's Wade Hampton census area is 31.3%.

The regional economy is extremely limited. 2006 census data lists 273 private businesses within the region. Most are in located in Bethel. Villages have almost no businesses at all—there are no restaurants, no bed and breakfasts (tourists and visiting agency people stay at the school), no child care facilities, no DVD rental stores, and often even no grocery store.

Villages would benefit from these types of businesses as well as from other services such as small engine repair, tourism and computer repair.

For example, the population of Kotlik is 591 and 96% of the population is Alaska Native. More than 21% of the population lives below the poverty level. The jobless rate is more than 57%.

Homes do not have indoor plumbing. Kotlik has four licensed businesses.

Another example is the second largest community (after Bethel) of Hooper Bay. The population of Hooper Bay is 1,153. Most homes lack plumbing. 63% of homes have no telephone. Hooper Bay has a total of 13 licensed businesses.

Recommendation:

- Provide comprehensive and intensive assistance to develop new, small, village-based businesses and support existing businesses in order to provide needed services and employ local residents. Barriers to business development must be removed and homebased technology-oriented business development should be emphasized. Support should be provided for AVCP's flight school, new aircraft mechanic school, and the local vocational trades school. Additional funds for education should be provided as well as assistance to de-fray the high costs of transportation services.

Issue 15: Native American Challenge Demonstration Project Act of 2009

America's Native peoples — American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians — continue to suffer disproportionately high rates of unemployment and poverty, poor health, substandard housing, and associated social ills when compared to any other group in our nation. Although there has been steady improvement, particularly in the area of health, there has been little progress in the last 30 years towards closing the gap between Native peoples and the American public at large in most indicators of well-being. This Demonstration Project aims to re-invigorate Native economies by building on concepts and principles of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and using

a compacting model to channel development funds to locally-designed economic development strategies.

Recommendation:

- Congress should enact the proposed Native American Challenge Demonstration Project Act of 2009 as part of its efforts to stimulate the economy and revitalize rural areas. As initially proposed, the project would authorize \$100 million over 5 years, for disbursement to a total of 5 pilot projects. One project each should be funded in Alaska and Hawaii and three in the Lower 48 states.

Issue 16: Yuut Yaqungviat, LLC (“Where People Earn Their Wings”)

AVCP's region is remote and isolated. No roads connect villages to each other or to the rest of Alaska. Air travel is essential to life in rural Alaska. All medicine, food, supplies and mail is flown in. Yuut Yaqungviat, LLC, is a rural aviation and flight training center, providing commercial pilot training. Located in Bethel, the flight training center prepares Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta residents for professional positions within air freight and air transport businesses operating throughout Alaska.

The airline business is the highest job producing industry in Southwest Alaska and has chronic shortages of trained employees. Historically, this worker shortage has been met by importing pilots from the Lower 48 states who stay in the area for an average of 2 years and then return to the Lower 48. Alaska suffers a double impact from this trend: the wages paid to the visiting pilots are exported out of the state; and after obtaining additional training and building flight hours, experienced pilots leave the state to work for regional



Vocabulary tests show that the region's incoming kindergartners, who have not been in a preschool program, are an average of 2 years behind in vocabulary development in either language.

and national air carriers creating a perpetual staff shortage and training burden for Alaskan businesses.

Yuut Yaqungviat, LLC, is already changing that trend, by training local people in Southwest Alaska to become commercial pilots. The most effective pilot and air mechanic training is done in the region under real-time conditions. Supporting air safety training schools in rural locations pays huge dividends. AVCP has seen that Alaskan residents want to stay in their home communities and maintain close connections with their families. Accordingly, their wages stay in their hometowns and there is increased investment in rural Alaska as people build homes and take places of responsibility in the community.

Every trained pilot that Yuut Yaqungviat, LLC, produces is estimated to contribute \$500,000 in economic growth in their home villages over a ten year career, with many pilots continuing to fly for 25 to 30 year careers. Yuut Yaqungviat, LLC, and its predecessor, the AVCP Tribal College Aviation Program, has assisted approximately 70 students in their dream of becoming certified professional pilots. Of the 70 students, 60 were Alaska Native.

To date, 29 private pilot certificates have been issued, 15 instrument ratings have been issued, 14 commercial pilot certificates have been issued, 7 students are working towards their instrument rating, and 8 are working towards their private pilot certificate.

In the commercial and transportation hub of Bethel alone, there are 250 commercial pilot jobs available with various air taxi services providing passenger and freight service to the villages in the AVCP Region. Training and retaining local pilots improves airlines' bottom line, as the retention of pilots,



CINDY ANDRECHECK/COURTESY PHOTO

Some of the sixth-graders from Bethel's Kilbuck Elementary attended college classes at the University of Alaska Fairbanks' Kuskokwim Campus as April 3 as part of the "I'm Going to College" program.

mechanics and maintenance workers, provides lower insurance rates, reduces new hire training costs, and improves equipment maintenance.

The savings that airlines make is passed on to customers in the region. AVCP hopes to open a second school in the coming months, this one to train aircraft mechanics. High quality employment opportunities for the young adults and youths in the region also promote healthy lifestyles, and combat drug and alcohol abuse in a population assaulted by a sense of boredom and worthlessness that pervades dispirited youths in isolated communities.

Recommendation:

- To increase aviation safety in rural America, AVCP asks that bill language be added to the Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization legislation that would annually set aside \$2 million in the Airport Improvement Program for recurring grants to schools in rural Alaska offering training for aircraft pilots and mechanics.

Issue 17: Libraries and Literacy

Literacy rates for our region are the worst in the nation. Our children routinely score in the lowest quadrille on standardized tests. The development of village public libraries will bring information to every village along with children's programs, books, newspapers and basic library services. In 41 of 47 communities, the situation is the same—only the schools have small libraries that are generally not open to the public. Many parents in AVCP's villages do not know how to read proficiently. Yup'ik is most often the first language spoken. English is learned as a second language. The vast majority of teachers are non-Native individuals from outside of Alaska. They are unfamiliar with the culture, traditions and ways of being that set Yup'ik culture apart from others. Turnover rates of teachers are extremely high. Most do not teach in any community more than 1 year. Teachers of young children do not speak the Native language, a significant obstacle to early literacy.

Access to information is another barrier to literacy. The region has a compelling need for quality programs that address literacy issues in a culturally-relevant method. Programs need to be developed and implemented that involve parents and families, even if the parents themselves cannot read. Bilingual tutors for young children are required. Libraries must be strengthened to make every resident feels comfortable with libraries and library programs so that they will bring their young children to "story hour" and encourage their children to participate in reading programs.

Recommendation:

- Provide technical assistance, training and funding to all communities to fund public libraries that provide access to the internet, books and children's programs. Access to information should be a priority and be considered an essential community service.

Issue 18: After-School Programs

The AVCP region has 52 schools in six school districts. Regional enrollment for the 2008-2009 school year was 7,362. The smallest school has 14 students while the largest, located in Bethel, has 508. In most schools, the situation is dire. For example, consider Kotlik. For the 2007 – 2008 school year, Kotlik had 193 students and:

- 47% of students were below proficient in reading and 25% were not proficient
- 52% of students were below proficient in writing and 19% were not proficient
- 33% of students were below proficient in math and 47% were not proficient.

During the 2007 – 2008 school year, Hooper Bay had 413 students and:

- 33% of students were below proficient in reading and 48% were not proficient
- 54% of students were below proficient in writing and 25% were not proficient
- 24% of students were below proficient in math and 58% were not proficient.

Recommendation:

- Provide funding for after-school programs. Funding must include training and technical assistance and operational funding that will enable after-school activities to function. After-school programs should be project-based, culturally-appropriate, create opportunities that promote positive youth development, and teach young people life skills.

Issue 19: Johnson O' Malley Program

The Johnson O' Malley Program is a supplemental education program that in the past years was funded by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. The program was designed to meet the unique and specialized needs of Native American students attending public schools. The program's objectives included securing for Native children the educational opportunities and learning environment necessary to fulfill their educational needs; promoting understanding and improving relationships between the school, home, and community; cooperation in developing and supporting in-service training for teachers of Native children; and providing financial assistance to local school districts for implementation of programs, services, and activities jointly planned and mutually approved by the school and the Native community.

Recommendation:

- Reinstate recurring Johnson O'Malley Program funding.

Issue 20: Barriers in Federal Programs

Native Villages have a difficult time submitting and reporting on federal grants electronically. Aging infrastructure, aerial phone lines in a region characterized by pervasive winds, and dial-up Internet connections all make electronic submission of reports and grants very difficult.

Many agencies require online submission of grant proposals. Since the advent of grants.gov, the region has seen a 48% drop in grants submitted. While some federal agencies permit mailing in applications, they must still be received by the deadline. Such deadlines are virtually impossible to meet when extreme inclement weather restricts air and mail travel. In order to insure an application is received on time, villages need to mail a package at least 3 weeks in advance. If a grant is only open for 6 weeks, this reduces the time in half that a tribe has to develop a project, confirm memorandums of agreement, hold community meetings and complete other tasks.

Recommendation:

- Exempt Alaska's tribes to allow villages to submit grants and reports by mail with a postmark date that is the same as the closing date for all other applicants. ■



STATEMENT OF ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR:

The U.S. Department of Energy



High costs of living, poor salmon runs, fishery competition from international markets, high energy costs, fuel shortages, high unemployment and inadequate transportation and energy infrastructure all contribute to the basic economic and energy problems faced within the AVCP /Calista Region today. The following issues and recommendations are a summary of the key energy challenges in our communities and the respective proposed solutions.

Issue 1: Energy Security and Economic Stability

Develop integrated community energy solutions that meet local energy requirements and economic development needs

Recommendations:

- Enhance access to renewable energy and energy efficiency alternatives, determine feasibility of renewable energy resource development, and develop local human and technical resource capacity.
- Establish an Alaska Office of the U.S. Department of Energy to serve and assist the 228 federally recognized Alaska tribes and over 180 local governments and numerous energy and electric providers.

Issue 2: Energy Parity and Stability

Make home heating and weatherization affordable and equitable.

Recommendation:

- Expand weatherization and energy efficiency programs to include community facilities and commercial buildings to enable weatherization improvements and deployment of energy cost saving technologies.

Issue 3: Energy Generation and Transmission

Consolidate local utility operations and management, improve energy efficiency of power generation systems, and smart grid development.

Enhance economies of scale for renewable and basic energy services by supporting the interconnection of numerous small, isolated loads with electrical inerties.

Recommendations:

- Expand renewable energy efficiency deployment programs to include assistance for isolated utility consolidation, financing for power generation system upgrades, electrical interconnection of villages and smart grid deployment.
- Support the technological pioneering efforts of Alaskan rural cooperatives and utilities such as Alaska Village Electric Cooperative to continue to integrate wind into its small isolated diesel systems

Issue 4: AVCP Regional Offices & Museum

AVCP's region is the poorest in the State of Alaska, and is the eighth poorest region in the nation. Villages are remote and are only accessible only by plane or boat. AVCP provides variety of social service, human development and culturally relevant programs that build capacity within and empower tribal members, promote tribal self-determination and self-governance, and protect tribal culture and traditions. The high cost of fuel has led to an enormous increase in transportation costs. This is placing an immense strain on families as the price for all food, goods, and heating fuel skyrockets. AVCP's indirect costs are increasing as the cost of fuel increases. As a result, fewer funds go directly to essential programs.

Currently, AVCP's program staff is located in 3 separate buildings. Social service program staff are located in two 2 fully-occupied buildings owned by AVCP. AVCP's Yupiit Piciryarait Museum rents a third small space, which includes all galleries, offices, and storage at an off-site location. AVCP's office buildings are at maximum capacity, as is its museum, and there is no more space to expand. The buildings AVCP owns are old and are in need of costly retrofitting to make them energy efficient. AVCP staff spend work time driving back and forth between buildings, thereby creating administrative inefficiencies and limiting productivity.

Recommendation:

- Provide sufficient funding to construct a new building that will house all of AVCP's programs including the museum in one adequate, energy efficient space. A new building will enable AVCP to expand services which will create more jobs and reduce operational costs allowing more federal money to go directly to programs. While AVCP does not have the resources to build a new office building, we do own a vacant parcel of land upon which we can construct a new building.



Heating fuel is costly in rural Alaska. With some villages paying more than \$8 a gallon, some say it's the costliest heating fuel in the U.S. Here, firewood collected on a sled provided warmth in the village of Newtok last winter.

Issue 5: Indian Reservation Roads Program

AVCP's 56 member tribes reside in small isolated villages scattered throughout an area that is approximately 59,000 square miles and roughly the size of the state of Oregon. The villages are not connected by road to one another, or to the rest of Alaska. AVCP has initiated a regional effort to pool village U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Reservation Roads (IRR), program funds to enable villages to coordinate the planning and development of transportation projects, leverage additional funds, and complete desperately needed transportation infrastructure.

The construction of roads and boardwalks in the region's villages will improve community health and safety by controlling dust as roads are paved and dirt trails are improved with boardroads (same as boardwalks). As roads and boardwalks are built, access to traditional subsistence resources will be provided, local jobs will be created, and project-employed village residents will increase their skill levels. Economic development will also occur throughout the region as airports, barge landings, ports, docks, and roads are connected to one another in places where they currently are not. These connections will reduce costs involved in transporting goods and services, including but not limited to those associated with fuel and labor.

Recommendation:

- Provide a meaningful opportunity for AVCP to present and discuss our proposed amendments to the Indian Reservation Roads Program regulations set out in Title 23 U.S.C. Section 101(a) and 202(d).
- Amend Title 23 U.S.C. Section 101(a) to add a new paragraph that will more clearly define the areas of land for which Alaska's tribes are eligible for IRR funding, and amend Title 23 U.S.C. Section 202(d) to revise the formula by which IRR funds are appropriated and recognize Alaska village boardwalks as an eligible facility.

Issue 6: Energy Raters, Weatherization and Energy Conservation

Within the AVCP Region, homes and community facilities and buildings are poorly insulated. Heat and electricity is generated by diesel which is barged to villages during the short, ice-free, part of summer. Homes are heated by inefficient and outdated appliances. Windows and doors are substandard. The waitlist for an energy audit is extremely long since only 2 energy raters serve the entire region. Additionally, local and regional community organizations are hampered by the rising costs of energy when large sums are devoted to heating fuel and electricity, instead of directly to program services.

Recommendation:

- Create jobs in villages by providing funding to train village staff to be energy raters as well as weatherization/energy conservation technicians that specialize in building construction and energy savings technologies. Additionally, provide



funds that can be used to develop a revolving loan program to make home improvements since many families are unable to purchase energy efficiencies without assistance. The State of Alaska reimburses individuals for all home energy improvements documented by an energy audit, up to \$10,000 per home. Expand weatherization and energy efficiency programs to include community. Provide additional funding for home improvements and community building weatherization.

Issue 7: Renewable Energy Deployment

Provide for Energy Security and Economic Stability by developing integrated community energy solutions that meet local energy requirements and economic development needs.

Recommendations:

- Establish an Alaska Office of the U.S. Department of Energy to serve and assist the 231 federally recognized Alaska tribes, municipal governments, local utilities and other regional organizations.
- Enhance access to renewable energy and energy efficiency alternatives.
- Conduct feasibility determinations of renewable energy resource development.
- Develop local human capacity and technical resources.

Issue 8: Leveling Homes

Permafrost underlies the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region. Global warming is melting permafrost and damaging building infrastructures. In past years, many homes were built with substandard untreated lumber because treated lumber was too expensive for families living below the poverty level. Additionally, foundation posts were placed at the farthest intervals possible to save on lumber costs.

Today, because of rising temperatures, untreated lumber is beginning to rot at twice the speed it had previously. Melting permafrost is causing homes to sag and buckle and is not only compromising the integrity of building infrastructures, but is causing many houses to sink into the tundra. Beetles and carpenter ants are burrowing into the untreated lumber used in house foundations pads, post and beams making houses less stable. As home integrity fails, moisture produces mold that causes health and safety concerns.

Recommendation:

- Provide AVCP with sufficient funds to level 1,743 Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program homes over a 3 year period at the cost of \$6,000 per home. Five hundred eighty-one homes per year will be leveled, which will create numerous regional job opportunities.

Issue 9: Native American Challenge Demonstration Project Act of 2009

America's Native peoples — American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians — continue to suffer disproportionately high rates of unemployment and poverty, poor health, substandard housing, and associated social ills when compared to any other group in our nation. Although there has been steady improvement, particularly in the area of health, there has been little progress in the last 30 years towards closing the gap between Native peoples and the American public at large in most indicators of well-being. This Demonstration Project aims to re-invigorate Native economies by building on concepts and principles of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and using a compacting model to channel development funds to locally-designed economic development strategies.

Wind farms have made a dent in Western Alaska energy costs, but more money is needed to expand use of renewable sources.

Recommendation:

- Urge Congress to enact the proposed Native American Challenge Demonstration Project Act of 2009 as part of its efforts to stimulate the economy and revitalize rural areas. As initially proposed, the project would authorize \$100 million over 5 years, for disbursement to a total of 5 pilot projects. Fund one project each in Alaska and Hawaii and three in the Lower 48 states.

Issue 10: Barriers in Federal Programs

Native Villages have a difficult time submitting and reporting on federal grants electronically. Aging infrastructure, aerial phone lines in a region characterized by pervasive winds, and dial-up internet connections all make electronic submission of reports and grants very difficult. Many agencies require online submission of grant proposals. Since the advent of grants.gov, the region has seen a 48% drop in grants submitted. While some federal agencies permit mailing in applications, they must still be received by the deadline. Such deadlines are virtually impossible to meet when extreme inclement weather restricts air and mail travel. In order to insure an application is received on time, villages need to mail a package at least 3 weeks in advance. If a grant is only open for 6 weeks, this reduces the time in half that a tribe has to develop a project, confirm Memorandums of Agreement, hold community meetings and complete other tasks.

Recommendation:

- Provide a special exemption for Alaska's tribes which will allow villages to submit grants and reports by mail with a postmark date that is the same as the closing date for all other applicants.

Issue 11: Flexibility in Administering Federal Programs

Federal requirements that make sense in every other part of America are inefficient and ineffective, and cause delays and extra costs in Southwestern rural Alaska. For example, the Native Village of Akiachak was recently funded to construct a desperately needed jail. Akiachak has a population of 614. The village has a Public Safety Building, but it is in need of repairs. The tribe thought it would be more cost effective to build a new one. The village was successfully funded \$459,935 by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) for construction of a new facility. DOJ sent a technical assistance team to Akiachak. The team concluded that the jail would need to have 6 cells with showers, toilets and sinks, a dayroom, a kitchenette, a laundry, a booking/release area, a meeting/interview room, at least 1 office, a staff toilet, a janitors closet, storage, and a public lobby and waiting area. In a village where all homes haul water and bathroom waste, this project was transformed by DOJ's technical assistance team into an immense undertaking with a staggering cost; a cost far beyond what the tribe had been awarded and that the tribe could not support once completed. As a result, the project was defunded. This is one of many such examples.

Recommendation:

- Provided villages in Alaska flexibility in the administration of federal programs. While it is understood that standards exist and must be achieved, federal programs must also be able to adapt to reflect the needs of the specific community and its circumstances. A formal procedure must be instituted that addresses and remedies these situations. ■



STATEMENT OF ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR:

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development



AVCP Regional Housing Authority (AVCP Housing) is a nonprofit organization based in Bethel that serves the AVCP region, a 75,000-square-mile area in the Yukon Kuskokwim (Y-K) Delta region. The region is comparable in size to the state of Wisconsin or Illinois, and is home to 56 federally-recognized tribes. AVCP Housing was one of 16 housing authorities formed on October 17, 1974, by the Alaska Legislature to address affordable housing services and opportunities in rural Alaska. This makes AVCP Housing a state “public body corporate” with the same rights, duties and immunities as those associated with the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation and its predecessors, the Alaska State Mortgage Association and the Alaska State Housing Authority.

Issue 1: NAHASDA

Prior to the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act of 1996 (NAHASDA), all housing in rural Alaska was provided under the 1937 Housing Act by the U.S. Department and Urban Development (HUD). With the passage of NAHASDA, housing funds went directly to tribes, which then determine housing opportunities and programs in their communities. NAHASDA also allowed for a tribe to name a Tribally Designated Housing Entity (TDHE) to implement the NAHASDA program on its behalf. As of January 2009, 49 of the 56 federally-recognized tribes in the Y-K Delta have named AVCP Housing as their TDHE.

NAHASDA has allowed AVCP Housing to broaden its service opportunities. Today, the housing authority provides homeownership and housing opportunities for moderate to very-low income families to its member tribes.

It also provides home repair and renovation opportunities and tenant-based rental assistance opportunities. In addition, the company works with village corporations, and tribal and municipal governments, in developing rental housing and homeownership opportunities for the private sector at the village level.

Under NAHASDA, AVCP Housing builds between 25 to 50 homes annually. In addition, approximately 250 existing homes are repaired, renovated or modernized each year. The company manages, maintains and operates more than 1,080 units, including low income rentals, elderly, handicapped and assisted living facilities. NAHASDA provides millions of dollars for construction of homes in the severely depressed economies of the Bethel census and Wade Hampton census districts, which compose AVCP RHA's service area, also known as the Yukon-Kuskokwim (Y-K) Delta Region. Since 1976, AVCP RHA has constructed over 1,630 homes in 48 communities of the Y-K Delta.

AVCP Housing employs an average of 55 full-time, year-round employees and hundreds of seasonal workers (in 2008, we shipped out 565 W-2s). The authority spends an average of \$8.7 million in new housing construction work per summer and \$3.75 million for modernization projects, for a total of \$12.45 million in summer work projects in villages.

Recommendation:

- Urge continued support for NAHASDA by the president, Congress, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Issue 2: Force Account Labor

AVCP Housing constructs its own houses using the Force Account method. Force Account enables AVCP Housing to construct and hire work staff without contracting, resulting both in time and financial savings. Close to 100 percent of its hundreds of workers includes field project superintendents, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and laborers from AVCP region villages.

Force accounting has benefited the AVCP region greatly. When the force account method began to be implemented, there was a lack of trained and skilled work force in the region. To remedy this, AVCP Housing began training local people in housing construction and modernization jobs in partnership with the State of Alaska Department of Labor, the Alaska Works Partnership, the Denali Commission, and Yuut Elitnaurviat.

This resulted in a trained workforce for AVCP Housing to draw upon from the Y-K Delta every construction season. A greater percentage of unemployed or unemployable local residents from nearly every village now have careers or the skills and knowledge to work in construction fields.

Today, AVCP Housing hires up to 500 locals annually during each construction

season. This is very important because the AVCP region – consisting of the Bethel census district (16.6%) and Wade Hampton census district (25.3%) – has the highest unemployment and poverty rates in the state, and some of the highest rates in the nation.

Recommendation:

- Urge continued congressional and administration support for NAHASDA. Alaska housing authorities should have the option to utilize the Force Account method instead of being forced to comply with the Davis-Bacon Act or contracting options.

Issue 3: Substandard Housing in Rural Alaska

AVCP Housing's service consists of the Bethel census district (unemployment rate: 16.6%) and Wade Hampton census district (unemployment rate: 25.3%, highest in the state). AVCP Housing collects housing applications from residents from all of its member villages. Applicants complain of aging, substandard, and crowded home conditions, with some applicants having up to 11 people living in a small, one bedroom home. AVCP Housing has completed



A couple and their children live in this house in Newtok.



The Tanana tug boat that pushes fuel-loaded barges to villages along the Yukon River [ABOVE] also hauls junk out of villages so it can be scrapped or recycled in Fairbanks. In this photo, the tug and barges await old cars, bikes and other junk piled on the Alakanuk banks. In dozens of Western Alaska villages, everything must be delivered by barge or airplane, boosting prices. Here, a new skiff [LEFT] for a Nunam Iqua resident is loaded off the barge. Many Alaska villages also have no docks, so water craft are often tied to trees or bushes and temporary ramps are used to offload cargo.



was initially defunded by the federal government. Later, the program was temporarily reinstated as a result of economic stimulus funding.

Recommendation:

- Reinstatement of annual recurring funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Housing Improvement Program. AVCP's member tribes value this program. As AVCP's waiting list for home projects grows, houses age and existing homes become increasingly unsafe, unhealthy and uninhabitable.

Issue 5: Water and Sewer Services

"Rural Alaska is characterized by over 280 isolated villages scattered across an area more than twice the size of Texas. Populations in these communities are predominately Native and range between 25 and 6,000 residents, averaging about 300 residents per village." (Village Safe Water, State of Alaska)

Rural Alaska has been largely ignored when it comes to water and sewer services in the form of piped water. Alaska receives certain funding for water and sewer services from the federal government. Because there is such a long waiting list for these services, few villages in the AVCP region have piped water. Many Alaska village residents continue to suffer, having to use 5-gallon paint buckets as toilets and keep them in the home until they can be disposed of when they become full. Much effort is taken to dispose of the buckets, manually carrying them for long distances to a sewage lagoon or dump site.

Water for washing has to be obtained in buckets from local watering points or lakes and streams and brought home to be stored in a container, often a "clean" 30-gallon plastic trash can or washed-out 55 gallon "drum" once used for fuel or chemical storage. For washing, water is dipped with a pitcher by a household member and poured into a wash basin, which results in contamination of the wash water or drinking water container (Source: Office of Environmental Health, Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation). Lack of modern water service in Alaska is associated with high pediatric lower respiratory tract infection incidence (Alaska Division of Public Health, May 2008).

Every year, an assessment of the sanitation needs of Native Americans across the country is completed for the Indian Health Service (SDS or Sanitation Deficiency System). According to this assessment, the estimated 2009 total sanitation needs of Alaska's Native Villages is 429 projects with a cost of \$736 million for their completion (Village Safe Water, State of Alaska). It does appear that development of water and sewer services in the Y-K Delta is deliberately delayed, while the rest of Alaska communities have been enjoying water and sewer services for decades.

Recommendation:

- Provide adequate funding for development of safe water and sewer services in the Y-K Delta. All by itself, according to the SDS, The Y-K Delta has 34% of Alaska's total monetary need for 120 projects (25% of Alaska's total projects)

research that indicates that about 3,500 new homes are needed in the Y-K Delta with a cost of \$250,000 to \$300,000 each to build a 3 bedroom home in rural Alaska, the cost of meeting the housing need of the region's residents will cost between \$800 million to \$1 billion. At the rate of funding for housing projects in rural Alaska's Y-K Delta, around \$10 million annually, it will take 105 years to build these 3,500 homes. AVCP Housing, and other housing authorities in rural Alaska, need larger amounts of annual funding to meet the housing needs of rural Alaska in a more timely fashion. The health and well-being of Native Alaskans living in villages continues to be in jeopardy because of the substandard housing and overcrowded conditions.

Recommendation:

- Increase funding for the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act to enable housing authorities in Alaska to receive \$30 million to \$50 million annually for the development of safe housing for rural Alaska residents in a more-timely fashion.

Issue 4: Housing Improvement Program

The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Housing Improvement Program (HIP), is a home improvement and replacement grant program that serves the neediest of the needy — American Indians and Alaska Natives who have substandard housing or no housing at all, and who have no immediate source of housing assistance. HIP is a secondary, safety-net housing program that seeks to eliminate substandard housing and homelessness in Indian communities by helping those who need it most obtain decent, safe and sanitary housing for themselves and their families. In AVCP's region, many tribal members live in unsafe, unhealthy, and uninhabitable homes. Many people are also homeless, but live in another person's home to avert harsh winter conditions through the homeowner's generosity. Originally, for the 2009 calendar year this program



— \$248 million is needed to provide adequate piped water and sewer services, as well as landfill and other supporting infrastructure, to each community that doesn't have running water and that lacks complete services.

Issue 6: Village Infrastructure - Board Walks, Roads and Streets

Without streets and roads in rural Alaska, it is extremely difficult to develop housing and other construction activities in the villages. Due to the need to be close to and gain access to subsistence hunting and fishing opportunities, most Alaska villages are situated on the shoreline of the Alaska coast and along the banks of sloughs and rivers.

The terrain of these community locations is low-lying, consisting of mud, sand or clay, and is prone to annual flooding. Therefore, we need boardwalks and roads or streets that float or are elevated enough to be above annual flood water levels.

Recommendation:

- Provide adequate funding to build reliable boardwalks, roads, and streets. Construction of adequate boardwalks can cost up to \$500,000 and streets or roads up to \$2 million. Village revenues and fiscal accounts are not sufficient enough to finance road and street construction. About one-half of the 50 villages in the Y-K Delta need adequate boardwalks and roads at a cost of \$62 million.

Issue 7: Village Public Safety Officer Program

The Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) Program, funded by the State of Alaska, began in the late 1970's as a means of providing rural Alaskan communities with that otherwise had no law enforcement presence with needed Public Safety Support Services. Village Public Safety Officers are the first responders to public safety emergencies in the villages and provide a wide array of vital services, including search and rescue, fire prevention and protection, emergency medical assistance, law enforcement, and probation and parole supervision services. Village Public Safety Officers, who do not carry guns, are generally the first to respond to any calls for help from community members, hence their motto, "First Responders – Last Frontier." Throughout our 56 villages, AVCP employs 19 village-based VPSOs. Dozens of our remote member villages have no form of local law enforcement present in the village or readily available. Many have no village based public-safety officer because no housing exists to house an officer. Housing for Village Public Safety Officers is a critical need. Renting a home or buying a vacant home is not an option as there are no homes or housing available. Those homes that exist are often overcrowded, substandard and unsafe.

Recommendation:

- Provide funds to hire additional Village Public Safety Officers and to build suitable homes for officers in communities where VPSO housing is non-existent. For several years, the following five villages have asked AVCP to find funds to



A substantial number of homes in dozens of villages still lack modern water and sewer services. In the lower Yukon River village of Nunam Iqua, residents throw human waste collected in honey buckets into containers [ABOVE]. A honey bucket at the store in Nunam Iqua [LEFT] last summer. The store has since closed.

build VPSO housing: Nunam Iqua, Marshall, Upper Kalskag, Lower Kalskag, and Russian Mission. Many other villages also need VPSO housing.

Issue 8: Landfills, Dump Sites and Honey Bucket Disposal

AVCP's member villages are underserved, undeveloped, and lacking in basic infrastructure. Homes lack piped water and sewer. Human waste is still hauled in honey buckets by hand to bunkers. Dump sites do not meet minimum standards for health and safety. Every day, more and more goods are flown into villages. The packaging of these goods never leaves our villages.

Environmental conditions such as permafrost, wetlands, flooding, drainage and dust, are a challenge to waste disposal. This region is the spring nesting and breeding grounds for ducks, black brants, emperor geese, northern pintails,

grebes, loons, swans and cranes and is, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the most important shorebird nesting area in the country. Marine mammals include spotted seals, ringed seals, Pacific walrus, Pacific bearded seals, whales and threatened Steller sea lions. The river, ponds and small streams are the habitat of at least 44 species of fish, including all 5 species of Pacific salmon.

Most villages have, at best, a Class 3 unpermitted landfill. Most villages have problems such as accidental, uncontrolled open burning, particulates blowing back over town, the spread of contaminated soil/snow from the tires and tracks of vehicles entering the dumpsite, non-burnable items such as old snowmobiles, trucks, and batteries leaking acids and people disposing of hazardous wastes at the dumpsite. There is no doubt these pollutants are leaching into the surrounding wetland environment. All villages have unofficial dumpsites and old honeybucket bunkers that need to be cleaned up and rehabilitated. Both in the past and today, ponds are often used as dump sites and waste is dumped indiscriminately into these sites. Dump sites have tons of discarded household items, old trucks, snowmachines, ATVs and scrap metal.

Recommendation:

- Provide adequate funding for villages to develop and implement Solid Waste Management Plans that will plan for the closure and rehabilitation of existing dumpsites, develop hazardous waste programs, eliminate honeybuckets, and construct new, safe landfills.

“Homes lack piped water and sewer. Human waste is still hauled in honey buckets by hand to bunkers. Dump sites do not meet minimum standards for health and safety. Every day, more and more goods are flown into villages. The packaging of these goods never leaves our villages.”

Issue 9: AVCP Regional Offices & Museum

AVCP's region is the poorest in the State of Alaska and is the eighth poorest nation-wide. Villages are remote and are accessible only by plane or boat. AVCP provides a variety of social service, human development and culturally relevant programs that build capacity within and empower tribal members, promote tribal self-determination and self-governance, and protect tribal culture and traditions. The high cost of fuel has led to an enormous increase in transportation costs. This is placing an immense strain on families as the price for all food, goods, and heating fuel skyrockets. AVCP's indirect costs are increasing as the cost of fuel increases. As a result, fewer funds go directly to programs.

Currently, AVCP's program staff is located in 3 separate buildings. Social service program staff are located in two 2 fully-occupied buildings owned by AVCP. AVCP's Yupiit Piciryarait Museum rents a third small space, which includes all galleries, offices, and storage at an off-site location. AVCP's office buildings are at maximum capacity, as is its museum, and there is no more space to expand. The buildings AVCP owns are old and are in need of costly retrofitting to make them energy efficient. AVCP staff spend work time driving back and forth between buildings, thereby creating administrative inefficiencies and limiting productivity.

Recommendation:

- Provide AVCP with adequate funding to construct a new building that will house all of AVCP's programs including the museum in one adequate, energy efficient space. A new building will enable AVCP to expand services which will create more jobs and reduce operational costs allowing more federal money to go directly to programs. While AVCP does not have the resources to build a new office building, we do own a vacant parcel of land upon which we can construct a new building.

Issue 10: Energy Raters, Weatherization and Energy Conservation

Within the AVCP Region homes and community facilities and buildings are poorly insulated. Heat and electricity is generated by diesel which is barged to villages during the short, ice-free, part of summer. Homes are heated by inefficient and outdated appliances. Windows and doors are substandard. The waitlist for an energy audit is extremely long since only 2 Energy Raters serve the entire region. Additionally, local and regional community organizations are hampered by the rising costs of energy when large sums are devoted to heating fuel and electricity, instead of directly to program services.

Recommendation:

- Create jobs in villages by providing funding to train village staff to be Energy Raters as well as Weatherization/Energy Conservation Technicians that specialize in building construction and energy savings technologies. Additionally, provide funds that can be used to develop a revolving loan program to make home improvements since many families are unable to purchase energy efficiencies without assistance. The State of Alaska reimburses individuals for all home energy improvements documented by an energy audit, up to \$10,000 per home. Expand weatherization and energy efficiency programs to include community-owned buildings. Provide additional funding for home improvements and community building weatherization.

Issue 11: Renewable Energy Deployment

Provide for Energy Security and Economic Stability by developing integrated community energy solutions that meet local energy requirements and economic development needs.

Recommendation:

- Establish an Alaska Office of the U.S. Department of Energy to serve and assist the 231 federally recognized Alaska tribes, municipal governments, local utilities and other regional organizations. Enhance access to renewable energy and energy efficiency alternatives. Conduct feasibility determinations of renewable energy resource development. Develop local human capacity and technical resources.

Issue 12: Leveling Homes

Permafrost underlies the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region. Global warming is melting permafrost and damaging building infrastructures. In past years, many homes were built with substandard, untreated lumber because treated lumber was too expensive for families living below the poverty level. Additionally, foundation posts were placed at the farthest intervals possible to save on lumber costs.

Today, because of rising temperatures, untreated lumber is beginning to rot at twice the speed it had previously. Melting permafrost is causing homes to sag and buckle and is not only compromising the integrity of building infrastructures, but is causing many houses to sink into the tundra. Beetles and carpenter ants are burrowing into the untreated lumber used in house foundations pads, post and beams making houses less stable. As home integrity fails, moisture produces mold that causes health and safety concerns.

Recommendation:

- Provide AVCP sufficient funds to level 1,743 Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program homes over a 3 year period at the cost of \$6,000 per home. Five hundred eighty-one homes per year will be leveled, which will create numerous regional job opportunities.

Issue 13: Relocating Eroding Villages

Every community in the AVCP region is built upon permafrost. The permafrost is melting because of warming air temperatures and a warmer ocean. Sea ice that protects villages is forming later in the year, which allows fall storms to greatly impact the shoreline. Many villages are at or below sea level and sinking.

Recommendation:

- Fund the relocation of villages. Leaders in the AVCP region believe that the cost of relocating a community has been incorrectly calculated and is far less than the amounts estimated by the federal government. AVCP believes these staggeringly high, incorrect projected costs have become a barrier to assisting villages. AVCP will assist villages with developing accurate cost plans for relocation.

Issue 14: Native American Challenge Demonstration Project Act of 2009

America's Native peoples — American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians — continue to suffer disproportionately high rates of unemployment and poverty, poor health, substandard housing, and associated social ills when compared to any other group in our nation. Although there has been steady improvement, particularly in the area of health, there has been little progress in the last 30 years towards closing the gap between Native peoples and the American public at large in most indicators of well-being. This Demonstration Project aims to re-invigorate Native economies by building on concepts and principles of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and using a compacting model to channel development funds to locally-designed economic development strategies.

Recommendation:

- Urge Congress to enact the proposed Native American Challenge Demonstration Project Act of 2009 as part of its efforts to stimulate the economy and revitalize rural areas. As initially proposed, the project would authorize \$100 million over 5 years, for disbursement to a total of 5 pilot projects. One project each should be funded in Alaska and Hawaii, and three in the Lower 48 states.

Issue 15: Barriers in Federal Programs

Native Villages have a difficult time submitting and reporting on federal grants electronically. Aging infrastructure, aerial phone lines in a region characterized by pervasive winds, and dial-up internet connections all make electronic submission of reports and grants very difficult. Many agencies require online submission of grant proposals. Since the advent of grants.gov, the region has seen a 48% drop in grants submitted. While some federal agencies permit mailing in applications, they must still be received by the deadline. Such deadlines are virtually impossible to meet when extreme inclement weather restricts air and mail travel. In order to insure an application is received on time, villages need to mail a package at least 3 weeks in advance. If a grant is only open for 6 weeks, this reduces the time in half that a tribe has to develop a project, confirm Memorandums of Agreement, hold community meetings and complete other tasks.

Recommendation:

- Exempt tribes in Alaska to allow them to submit grants and reports by mail with a postmark date that is the same as the closing date for all other applicants.

Issue 16: Flexibility in Administering Federal Programs

Federal requirements that make sense in every other part of America are inefficient and ineffective, and cause delays and extra costs in Southwestern rural Alaska. For example, the Native Village of Akiachak was recently funded to construct a desperately needed jail. Akiachak has a population of 614. The village has a Public Safety Building, but it is in need of substantial repairs. The tribe thought it would be more cost effective to build a new one.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) awarded Akiachak \$459,935.00 for construction of a new facility. DOJ sent a technical assistance team to Akiachak. The team concluded that the jail would need to have 6 cells with showers, toilets and sinks, a dayroom, a kitchenette, a laundry, a booking/release area, a meeting/interview room, at least 1 office, a staff toilet, a janitors closet, storage, and a public lobby and waiting area. In a village where all homes haul water and bathroom waste, this project was transformed by DOJ's technical assistance team into an immense undertaking with a staggering cost - a cost far beyond what the tribe had been awarded and that the tribe could not support once completed. As a result, USDOJ defunded the project. This is one of many such examples.

Recommendation:

- Provide villages flexibility in administering federal programs. While it is understood that standards exist and must be achieved, federal programs must also be able to adapt to reflect the needs of the specific community and its circumstances. A formal procedure must be instituted that addresses and remedies these situations. ■



STATEMENT OF ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR:

The U.S. Department of the Interior



The subsistence protections Congress intended in passing ANCSA, and those specifically established within Title VIII of ANILCA, have been considerably weakened, and are in danger of failing entirely. We urge this administration to take immediate action to safeguard our essential food resources and traditional way of life.

Issue 1: Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps

Requiring Alaska Natives to purchase federal licenses, known as Duck Stamps, to hunt migratory waterfowl is inconsistent with the 1996 protocol amending the migratory bird treaty between United States and Canada, and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, 16 USC 708, which implements the treaty. The protocol requires that any "regulations implementing the non-wasteful taking of migratory birds and the collection of their eggs by indigenous inhabitants of the State of Alaska shall be consistent with the customary and traditional uses of such indigenous inhabitants for their own nutritional and other essential needs." Alaska Native hunters have long viewed the subsistence harvest of migratory birds and their eggs as community tradition, and not as an individual entitlement that can be reduced to a system of individual permits. Requiring the purchase of Duck Stamps is inconsistent with custom and tradition and is, therefore, inconsistent with the treaty protocol.

Recommendation:

- Amend the Duck Stamp Act by adding an exemption for "eligible inhabitants of the State of Alaska engaged in the customary and traditional harvest of waterfowl and their eggs." We urge the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Obama administration to support this amendment.

Issue 2: Migratory Bird Co-Management

The protocol in the amended treaties between the United States, Canada, and Mexico recognizes the traditional subsistence harvest of migratory birds by indigenous inhabitants of Alaska, and provides that they "shall be afforded an effective and meaningful role" in "the development and implementation of regulations affecting the non-wasteful taking of migratory birds and the collection of eggs" through their participation in co-management bodies. In 2000, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service established the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council and 12 regional management bodies. Neither the Council nor the regional bodies have been adequately funded.

Recommendation:

- The Secretaries of Interior and State should support the implementation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and its co-management councils by including a treaty implementation line-item in the appropriate agency budget. We also urge Congress to ensure adequate funding in the annual appropriations to the agencies to cover the costs of these co-management bodies.

Issue 3: Reauthorization of the Marine Mammal Protection Act

The Indigenous Peoples' Council for Marine Mammals (IPCoMM), an AFN subcommittee, negotiated amendments to Section 119 of the MMPA with the federal agencies. Section 119 currently authorizes agreements between Alaska Native organizations and federal agencies to conserve marine mammals and to provide for co-management of their subsistence uses by Alaska Natives. It also authorizes funding each year for the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior to carry out these purposes.

The proposed amendments would allow the agencies to develop harvest management plans within existing or newly developed cooperative agreements in coordination with Alaska Native organizations. These plans would implement measures taken by Alaska Native organizations and their member tribes to regulate the subsistence take of marine mammals prior to a finding of depletion. The proposed legislation also provides for an increase in the annual amount authorized for implementation of Section 119 to cover the funding needs of IPCoMM and Alaska Native organizations engaged in co-management of marine mammals.

Recommendation:

- In the 110th Congress, Congressman Don Young introduced HR 5429, a stand-alone bill that incorporates a package of amendments to the MMPA that strengthen the co-management role of Alaska Native organizations engaged in co-management of marine mammals, and that enable federal agencies and

Alaska Native organizations to develop marine mammal conservation regimes collaboratively in order to avert management crises that could arise under the current system. We urge the Obama administration to support passage of similar legislation during the current Congress.

Issue 4: Federal Regulatory Protections for Subsistence Hunting and Fishing

Without adequate subsistence resources, most rural villages will not be able to put food on their tables, and communities will slowly disappear through out-migration. The cost of the resultant economic collapse and social dislocation would fall upon every Alaskan – Native and non-Native, urban and rural – and on local, state, and federal governments. As this nation contemplates how to rebuild and reorient itself during this economic crisis, it bears repeating that we all have a vested interest in ensuring that rural villages remain capable of sustaining themselves, rather than becoming more dependent upon federal welfare.



In July, this Marshall resident described the number of king salmon she had in her freezers this summer: three. Residents usually have a whole freezer full of them, but poor king returns to the Yukon River have reduced fishing.

Recommendations:

- Conduct a thorough Secretarial review and analysis of changes to federal enforcement of Title VIII of ANILCA over the past 6 years
- Move the Office of Subsistence Management and its annual budget to the Office of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior
- Consult with the Alaska Native community regarding appointment of the director and deputy director of OSM, and increase both the number of Native employees within OSM and their role in policymaking
- Withdraw the memorandum of understanding between the Federal Subsistence Board and the State of Alaska
- Defend the subsistence regulations adopted in January 1999 to implement the Katie John decision. We urge you to interpret broadly the scope of federal jurisdiction to fulfill the federal government's trust responsibility to Alaska Natives
- Amend Title VIII of ANILCA to exempt the membership of the Regional Advisory Councils from the requirements of the Federal Administrative Committees Act
- Amend Federal regulations implementing the rural priority to ensure that the Native Village of Saxman and other communities do not lose their right to a subsistence priority based on questionable interpretations of socio-economic data.



IAN FOULDS/COURTESY PHOTO

Issue 5: Subsistence

Subsistence is an integral component of the culture and traditions of the indigenous peoples of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Subsistence also supplements the expensive and limited selection of food available in village grocery stores. In AVCP's region, people consume 664 pounds of subsistence food per capita per year. The high cost of fuel has had a significant impact on the cost of food and there has been an increase in subsistence activities.

Decisions involving management of fish and game often rely on outdated and unreliable information. For example, the Federal Subsistence Board allowed additional animals to be taken based on a study conducted in the 1980s. AVCP believes the data is no longer accurate and cannot be used to make resource management decisions.

Methods used by the State of Alaska to document the subsistence harvest are not an effective method as harvest tickets are often not returned or incorrectly completed. Data collected is sparse and at times unreliable due to mistrust of the agency. There are many other subsistence resource uses that are currently undocumented or poorly researched due to funding limitations and the reluctance of researchers to stay in our communities for an extended period of time. As a result, accurate information is not obtained from the people that harvest the animals, fish, plants, etc.

The subsistence hunters, fishermen, and gatherers suffer as precious resources are allocated to the powerful western economic entities like the sport hunters, sport fishermen, the Bering Pollock Trawl Fishermen, commercial natural herbal medicinal and cosmetics businesses because information is unreliable. The State of Alaska will not fund additional research regarding this matter.

Recommendation:

- Provide AVCP with approximately \$6.5 million to create a Regional Subsistence Resource Research Program that will employ staff in villages and in sub-regions to collect information, record, analyze and interpret data, and develop accurate, substantiated and methodologically sound reports. The program will coordinate, utilize, and disperse scientifically proven information to resource management agencies and other commercial or private interests. Recurring funds will be needed.

Issue 6: Housing Improvement Program

The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Housing Improvement Program (HIP), is a home improvement and replacement grant program that serves the neediest of the needy--American Indians and Alaska Natives who have substandard housing or no housing at all and have no immediate source of housing assistance. HIP is a secondary, safety-net housing program that seeks to eliminate substandard housing and homelessness in Indian communities by helping those who need it most obtain decent, safe and sanitary housing for themselves and their families. In AVCP's region, many tribal members live in unsafe, unhealthy, and uninhabitable homes. Many people are also homeless, but live in another person's home to avert harsh winter conditions through the homeowner's generosity. Originally, for the 2009 calendar year this program was defunded by the federal government. Later, the program was temporarily reinstated as a result of economic stimulus funding.

Recommendation:

- Reinstate annual recurring funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Housing Improvement Program. AVCP's Member Tribes value this program and as AVCP's waiting list for home projects grows, houses age and existing homes

Katrina Dominic and her puppy, Spencer, maneuver around Bethel streets after floods this spring overwhelmed the town.

become increasingly unsafe, unhealthy and uninhabitable.

Issue 7: Tribal Courts

The tragic consequences of alcohol and drug abuse in rural Alaska are well known. The alcohol-related mortality rate of Alaska Natives is three and one-half times that of non-Natives, and the incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) among Alaska Natives is three times that of non-Natives. More than 97% of crimes committed by Alaska Natives are committed under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Existing state and federal laws and programs do not work and village tribal governments should be empowered to find local solutions at home.

Considering the fact that dozens of remote villages have no form of local law enforcement present or readily available, victims whose lives or property are in peril must often wait hours or sometimes even days for law enforcement officers to fly from a hub community to respond. Geographic and cost constraints have always and will always continue to prevent the state from having magistrates, troopers, prosecutors, etc., anywhere but in the largest communities. Because of these barriers, tribes are establishing tribal courts to serve as first responders in handling both civil disputes and criminal cases. Tribal courts can address situations promptly and provide culturally relevant solutions and holistic approaches that involve rebuilding traditional and community values and empowering families.

Tribal courts can intervene earlier and more effectively than their state counterparts to deal with offenders in their own communities. Tribal governments are in place, and are the only government in many villages. They are far better situated to enforce and adjudicate civil matters and minor offenses in remote communities than their state counterparts which are not located in the villages.

Recommendation:

- Allocate funding to allow Alaska's tribes to structure their tribal courts as they choose and in a manner that will work best for them. Since time immemorial, Alaska's Native villages have addressed matters similar to those handled by tribal courts today.

Issue 8: Indian Reservation Roads Program

AVCP's 56 member tribes reside in small isolated villages scattered throughout an area that is approximately 59,000 square miles and roughly the size of the State of Oregon. The villages are not connected by road to one another, nor to the rest of Alaska. AVCP has initiated a regional effort to pool village U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Reservation Roads (IRR), program funds in order to enable villages to coordinate the planning and development of transportation projects, leverage additional funds, and complete desperately needed transportation infrastructure.

The construction of road and boardwalks in the region's villages will improve community health and safety by controlling dust once roads are paved and dirt trails are improved with boardroads (same as boardwalks). As roads and boardroads are built, access to traditional subsistence resources will be provided, local jobs will be created, and project-employed village residents



NATHAN BARKMAN/ALASKA NEWSPAPERS FILE PHOTO

will increase their skill levels. Economic development will also occur throughout the region as airports, barge landings, ports, docks, and roads are connected to one another in places where they currently are not. These connections will reduce costs involved in transporting goods and services, including but not limited to those associated with fuel and labor.

Recommendation:

- Provide AVCP a meaningful opportunity to present and discuss our proposed amendments to the Indian Reservation Roads Program regulations set out in Title 23 U.S.C. Section 101(a) and 202(d).
- Amend Title 23 U.S.C. Section 101(a) to add a new paragraph that will more clearly define the areas of land for which Alaska's tribes are eligible for IRR funding. AVCP also proposes to amend Title 23 U.S.C. Section 202(d) which will revise the formula by which IRR funds are appropriated and recognize Alaska village boardroads as an eligible facility.

Issue 9: Energy Raters, Weatherization and Energy Conservation

Within the AVCP Region homes and community facilities and buildings are poorly insulated. Heat and electricity is generated by diesel which is barged to villages during the short, ice-free, part of summer. Homes are heated by inefficient and outdated appliances. Windows and doors are substandard. The waitlist for an energy audit is extremely long since only 2 Energy Raters serve the entire region. Additionally, local and regional community organizations are hampered by the rising costs of energy when large sums are devoted to heating fuel and electricity, instead of directly to program services.

Recommendation:

- Create jobs in villages by providing funding to train village staff to be Energy Raters as well as Weatherization/Energy Conservation Technicians that specialize in building construction and energy savings technologies. Additionally, provide funds that can be used to develop a revolving loan program to make home improvements since many families are unable to purchase energy efficiencies without assistance. The State of Alaska reimburses individuals for all home energy improvements documented by an energy audit, up to \$10,000 per home. Expand weatherization and energy efficiency programs to include community. Provide additional funding for home improvements and community building weatherization.

Issue 10: Renewable Energy Deployment

Provide for Energy Security and Economic Stability by developing integrated community energy solutions that meet local energy requirements and

economic development needs. **At fish camp, Maureen Nicholas (left) of Kasigluk prepares a king salmon while Katherine Stevens fillets. Studies show that 56 percent of the king salmon bycatch of the pollock fishery are of Western Alaska origin. Kuskokwim River ice jams [FACING PAGE] and floods in Akiak this spring.**

economic development needs.

Recommendations:

- Establish an Alaska Office of the U.S. Department of Energy to serve and assist the 229 federally recognized Alaska tribes, municipal governments, local utilities and other regional organizations.
- Enhance access to renewable energy and energy efficiency alternatives.
- Conduct feasibility determinations of renewable energy resource development.
- Develop local human capacity and technical resources.

Issue 11: Leveling Homes

The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region is underlain with permafrost. Global warming is melting permafrost and damaging building infrastructures. In past years, many homes were built with substandard untreated lumber because treated lumber was too expensive for families living below the poverty level. Additionally, foundation posts were placed at the farthest intervals possible to save on lumber costs.

Today, because of rising temperatures, untreated lumber is beginning to rot at twice the speed it had previously. Melting permafrost is causing homes to sag and buckle and is not only compromising the integrity of building infrastructures, but is causing many houses to sink into the tundra. Beetles and carpenter ants are burrowing into the untreated lumber used in house foundations pads, post and beams making houses less stable. As home integrity fails, moisture produces mold that causes health and safety concerns.

Recommendation:

- Provide AVCP with sufficient funds to level 1,743 Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program homes over a 3 year period at the cost of \$6,000 per home. Five hundred eighty-one homes per year will be leveled and will create numerous regional job opportunities.

Issue 12: Relocating Eroding Villages

Every community in the AVCP region is built upon permafrost. The perma-

“The subsistence hunters, fishermen, and gatherers suffer as precious resources are allocated to the powerful western economic entities because information is unreliable.”



STATE OF ALASKA/COURTESY PHOTO

frost is melting because of warming air temperatures and a warmer ocean. Sea ice that protects villages is forming later in the year, which allows fall storms to greatly impact the shoreline. Many villages are at or below sea level, and are sinking.

Recommendation:

- Fund the relocation of villages. Leaders in the AVCP region believe that the cost of relocating a community has been incorrectly calculated and is far less than the amounts estimated by the federal government. AVCP believes these staggeringly high incorrect projected costs have become a barrier to assisting villages. AVCP will assist villages with developing accurate cost plans for relocation.

Issue 13: Broadband Internet Capability & Future Needs Assessment

Throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, home computers are uncommon. Access to the Internet is limited to the school in many villages. There is not a gap or weakness of services, infrastructure and opportunities, there simply are no services or opportunities or infrastructure. Almost every resident of the region has had no opportunity to use computers or access electronic information and the internet. Powerful technology is changing the way the world accesses information, learn, work and connect to each other. Technology will significantly alter the economy in our region by enabling people to live in their Native village and receive effective training without relocating their family. Access to online information on health care, nutrition, community planning and finances will increase the quality of life.

In order to improve Internet access, AVCP needs to better understand what services are currently available in each village. AVCP must determine whether, if any Internet service exists at all, it is provided by cable, wireless or DSL connections. Currently, AVCP has no way of knowing how to proceed with broadband infrastructure projects because of these unknown factors.

Recommendation:

- Provide funding for AVCP to conduct a detailed survey of existing village internet services in order to assess current capabilities and the future needs of every community. From the data collected, AVCP will develop a comprehensive plan for expanding, developing and improving access to the Internet.

Issue 14: Indian Child Welfare Act Program

While Alaska Native/American Indians make up only 15.2% of Alaska's population, Alaska Native children comprise 62% of all children in out-of-home placements in Alaska. Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) funds have not increased as tribal child and youth populations have continued to grow. The amount of work required by a tribe in order to operate a successful and proactive ICWA program has increased each year, as has the amount of time and cost needed to provide appropriate technical training to an ICWA social worker.

Recommendation:

- Increase funding for the Indian Child Welfare Act Program to adequately fund the number of Alaska Native/American Indian children being placed in custody, and meet tribes' and workers' technical and training needs.

Issue 15: Sex Crimes

The State of Alaska has 6 times the national average of reported child sexual assault. The rape rate is 2.2 times the national average. The numbers are

higher in Southwest Alaska. In 2003-2004, there were 989 reports of sexual assault or abuse of a minor in Alaska. Of those 989, 476 came from the western region. In 2006, the Bethel Regional District Attorney's office, which serves a population of 22,000, received more reports of sex crimes than the municipality of Anchorage, a population of more than 260,000 people. Sixty-five villages in the state have no local police or law enforcement. Over 200 of Alaska's villages do not have sexual response teams to properly collect evidence and interview a victim after a rape has occurred.

Recommendation:

- Provide AVCP with sufficient funds to partner with the Alaska State Troopers and other local agencies to facilitate providing support, structure, and guidance to villages in the development of culturally relevant and community specific solutions needed to combat the high incidence of sex crimes. The development of culturally relevant and community specific solutions will restore health and well-being to communities, families, and children.

Issue 16: Village-Based Business Development

The villages in AVCP's region have the highest unemployment rate, the highest jobless rate and are the poorest in the State of Alaska. Many families are dependent on public assistance for survival. The unavailability of work, the dependency on public assistance payments and the hopelessness that accompanies such dependency has been linked to a myriad of social problems. High rates of alcohol and substance abuse, suicide, depression, and domestic violence have all been affiliated with chronic unemployment. While the unemployment rate for the State of Alaska is 8.4 %, the unemployment rate for the Bethel census area is 17.3% and the unemployment rate for the region's Wade Hampton census area is 31.3%.

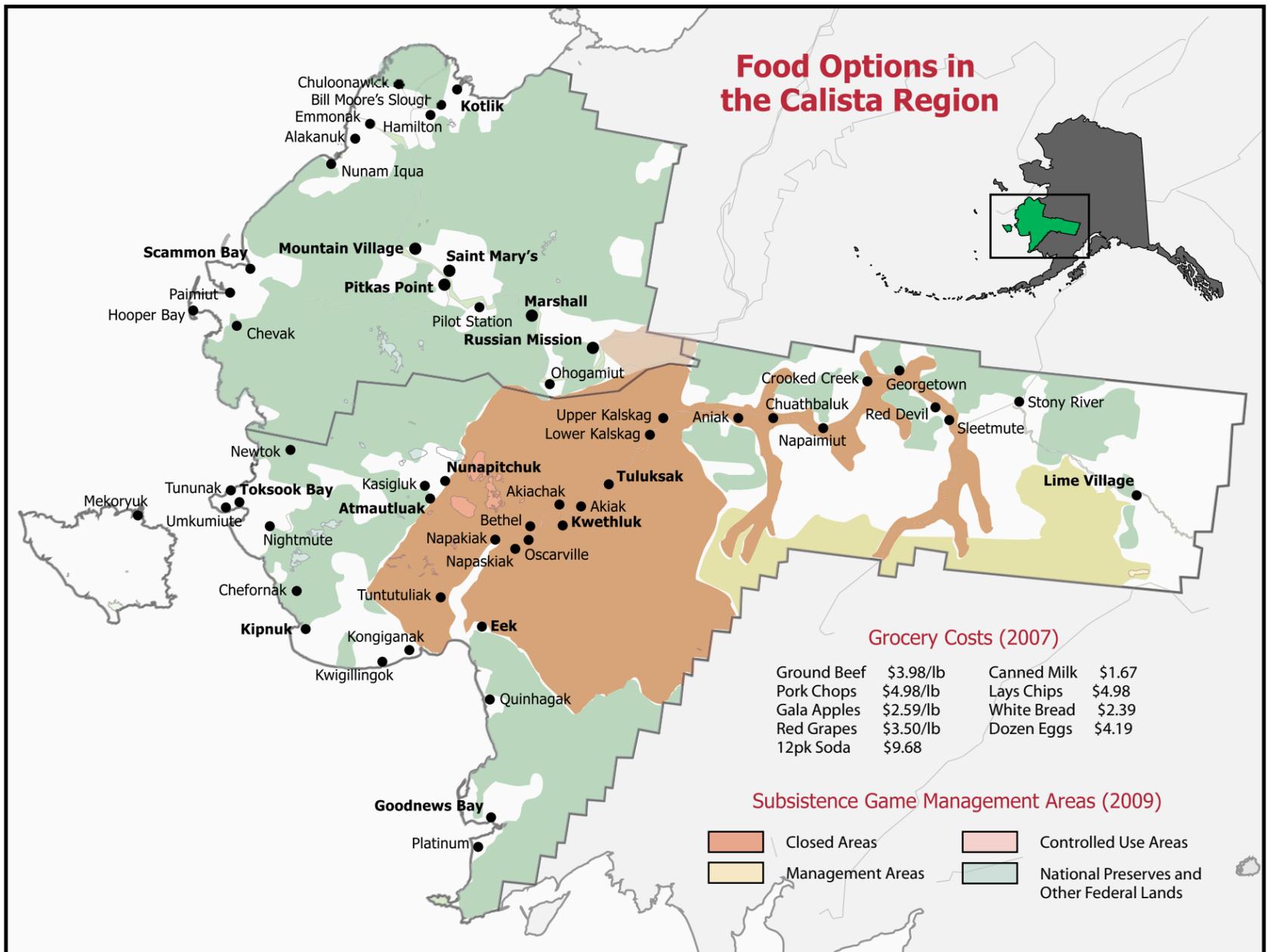
The regional economy is extremely limited. 2006 census data lists 273 private businesses within the region. Most are in located in Bethel. Villages have almost no businesses at all—there are no restaurants, no bed and breakfasts (tourists and visiting agency people stay at the school), no child care facilities, no DVD rental stores, and often no grocery store. Villages would benefit from these types of businesses as well as from other services such as small engine repair, tourism and computer repair.

For example, the population of Kotlik is 591. 96% of the population is Alaska Native. More than 21% of the population lives below the poverty level. The jobless rate is more than 57%. Homes do not have indoor plumbing. Kotlik has only four licensed businesses.

Another example is the second largest community (after Bethel) of Hooper Bay. The population of Hooper Bay is 1,153. Most homes lack plumbing. 63% of homes have no telephone. Hooper Bay has a total of 13 licensed businesses.

Recommendation:

- Provide comprehensive and intensive assistance to develop new small village-based businesses and support existing businesses in order to provide needed services and employ local residents.
- Remove barriers to business development and emphasize home-based technology-oriented business development should be emphasized.
- Provide support for AVCP's flight school, new aircraft mechanic school, and the local vocational trades school.
- Provide additional funds for education and assistance to de-fray the high costs of transportation services.



Issue 17: Native American Challenge Demonstration Project Act of 2009

America's Native peoples - American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians - continue to suffer disproportionately high rates of unemployment and poverty, poor health, substandard housing, and associated social ills when compared to any other group in our nation. Although there has been steady improvement, particularly in the area of health, there has been little progress in the last 30 years towards closing the gap between Native peoples and the American public at large in most indicators of well-being. This Demonstration Project aims to re-invigorate Native economies by building on concepts and principles of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and using a compacting model to channel development funds to locally-designed economic development strategies.

Recommendation:

- Encourage Congress to enact the proposed Native American Challenge Demonstration Project Act of 2009 as part of its efforts to stimulate the economy and revitalize rural areas. As initially proposed, the project would authorize \$100 million over 5 years, for disbursement to a total of 5 pilot projects. One project each should be funded in Alaska and Hawaii and three in the Lower 48 states.

Issue 18: Libraries and Literacy

Literacy rates for our region are the worst in the nation. Our children routinely score in the lowest quadrille on standardized tests. The development of village public libraries will bring information to every village along with children's programs, books, newspapers and basic library services. In 41 of 47 communities, the situation is the same—only the schools have small libraries that are generally not open to the public. Many parents in AVCP's villages do not know how to read proficiently. Yup'ik language is most often the first language spoken. English is learned as a second language. The vast majority of teachers are non-Native individuals from outside of Alaska. They are unfamiliar with the culture, traditions and ways of being that set Yup'ik culture apart from others. Turnover rates of teachers are extremely high. Most do not teach in any community more than 1 year. Teachers of young children do not speak the Native language, a significant obstacle to early literacy.

Access to information is another barrier to literacy. The region has a compelling need for quality programs that address literacy issues in a culturally-relevant method. Programs need to be developed and implemented that involve parents and families, even if the parents themselves cannot read. Bilingual tutors for young children are required. Libraries must be strengthened to make every resident feels comfortable with libraries and library programs so that they will bring their young children to Story Hour and encourage their children to participate in reading programs.

Recommendation:

- Provide technical assistance, training and funding to all communities to fund public libraries that provide access to the internet, books and children's programs. Access to information should be a priority and be considered an essential community service.

Issue 19: Adherence to Local Hire Program in Section 1308 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act

Section 1308 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) allows federal land management agencies to hire local residents based upon their specialized knowledge or expertise. The program has provided important employment opportunities throughout Alaska for more than 28 years. A recent change to the program imposed by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) requires the departments of the Interior and Agriculture to utilize a competitive hiring process for filling jobs under the local hire program. This change is inconsistent with both the language and intent of the statute and if allowed to stand will result in the loss of job opportunities in areas of the state where such job opportunities are already limited. In some villages, jobs under this program may be the only ones available.

Recommendation:

- Direct the OPM to reconsider its position on competitive hiring and work with the responsible federal agencies in Alaska to ensure this program continues to benefit Alaskans and federal public lands in this state.

Issue 20: Critical Research Needs in Western Alaska

The declining salmon stocks in Alaska have imposed hardships on communities, fishermen, and Alaskan natives who rely on these fish. Information gaps have led to abject failures to predict salmon declines and determine appropriate management responses. With a consistent source of funds dedicated to research and monitoring of salmon in western Alaska, we can help address these declines. The time is upon us to prioritize salmon recovery in Alaska and in particular, western Alaska. Alaska is the last stronghold of salmon left in the Pacific. Yet, even with our undammed rivers and pristine habitat, we still have Alaskan salmon stocks that are in trouble. We know from experience that it is much more expensive to bring a stock back from the brink than it is to respond to early warning signs. The Department of Interior through the Bureau of Indian Affairs has, in the past, identified research funding for Western Alaskan salmon stocks, 1994-2005. The need has not diminished; it has increased tenfold and the attention to this situation must not be earmarked, it must be incorporated into the Department of Interior's mission and budget. The likeliest recipient for this funding is the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative. The Initiative is a partnership between public and non-profit institution which provide a forum for native regional organizations and state and federal agencies to cooperatively identify and address salmon research and restoration needs.

Recommendation:

- Establish a reliable source of funds (\$5 million - \$10 million annually) directed to the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative. These funds must be dedicated to western Alaska salmon stocks, designed for the purpose of understanding the trends and causes of variation in salmon abundance to assure sustainable uses of wild salmon for future generations. ■