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March 6, 2013

The Honorable Kevin Washburn  
Assistant Secretary –Indian Affairs  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Assistant Secretary Washburn:

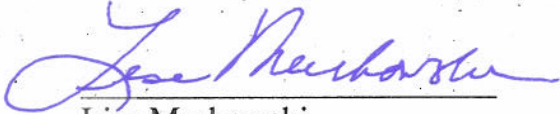
Several concerns have been raised by tribally-elected leaders in Alaska regarding the applicants for Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Alaska Region, as well as the process for consultation with federally recognized tribes in Alaska. As you know, nearly all of Alaska's tribes operate under self-governance compacts with the BIA, delivering the programs that fulfill the trust responsibility of the United States to Alaska Natives. In an era of self-determination, it concerns us that the BIA has disregarded the concerns of Alaska tribes that applicants under consideration are not Alaskan.

It is essential that this position be filled by an individual with deep knowledge of Alaska's tribal governance systems, as well as the geography and diversity of Alaska Native communities in order to fully appreciate and improve the experience of Alaska tribes and their interactions with the BIA. Alaska Natives are at the bottom of every socio-economic indicator in terms of poverty, education, healthcare, and unemployment. The challenges that face our Tribes and Tribal organizations demand a Director who will partner with tribes in upholding the trust responsibility of the United States. An honest partnership begins with appropriate tribal consultation in Alaska.

Our understanding is that the BIA tribal consultation policy requires the Bureau to provide timely notification of the formulated or proposed Federal action. It is particularly important that the BIA adhere to this policy when hiring for a position that has such direct and profound responsibilities to tribes in a single state. The BIA issued notice for consultation of a regional director 16 days prior to the meeting date. Tribe's inform us that the notice was electronically distributed with a large file attachment, which prevented the notice from being received electronically for some with limited internet capacity. Many tribes did not receive the notice of the identity of potential Directors under consideration.

The Bureau's handling of this situation has left a negative impression on a number of tribes in Alaska. We encourage you to take immediate action to address these concerns by conducting further outreach with tribes and considering eligible Alaskans for the position.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senator



Mark Begich  
United States Senator