



September 20, 2022

Sent Via Electronic Mail

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for your dedication and service to our country. We deeply appreciate your wisdom and compassion as you deal with challenges facing our country. We remember the respect you showed our late United States Senator Ted Stevens when you spoke at his memorial.

I write to you on behalf of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), which serves nearly half of all federally recognized tribes in the United States, to express our strong support for Alaska Governor Dunleavy's request for a federal disaster declaration related to the typhoon that has ravaged the people and communities of Western Alaska. I urge you to approve that request and deploy federal resources as soon as possible given the devastation to nearly 100 small and rural Native villages. Moreover, AFN believes it is important to describe to you the daunting logistical challenges many Alaskans, as well as federal disaster response officials, are experiencing in responding to this disaster given the remote locations of many of our communities. We know you share our belief that every American, no matter where they live, deserves a swift, effective, and efficient disaster response. Our tribal communities must have the tools to achieve a swift and robust recovery.

Your policies on building resilience and environmental justice and support adaptation are being solely tested by the impacts of this super storm. A sense of urgency must come from the top. This typhoon is the worst storm Alaska has seen in at least 50 years, and damage assessments have only just begun. It hit nearly 1,000 miles of coastline and caused damage in probably close to 100 rural Native villages – none of which are connected to the rest of the state by road. These Native villages all rely exclusively on air transportation to move food and goods, but runways are underwater. These communities have among the highest poverty rates in the nation, approaching 35 percent and the lowest employment participation rate. Unemployment is at least 400 times the national average, so Native families must rely on hunting and fishing as a primary source of food.

AFN has been informed that several communities have no clean water to drink – they were boiling water even before the typhoon – and others have no place to dispose of human waste. We have informed the Rural Development Administration that has emergency water funding available, and we strongly encourage you to work with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC), which is already managing sanitation funds through the Indian Health Service. Valerie Nurr'araaluk Davidson is the President of the Consortium, and her contact information is below:

Valerie Nurr'araaluk Davidson  
4000 Ambassador Dr.  
Anchorage, AK 99508  
[vj davidson@anthc.org](mailto:vj davidson@anthc.org)

AFN has heard from Native villages across Western Alaska that have lost homes, power plants, roads, fuel tanks, fishing boats and gear, and other critical infrastructure. More concerning, we have also learned about Native villages without water or access to human waste disposal. Still others lost most of the fish that they put up from the summer season, in addition to moose meat from the fall hunting season. Unfortunately, with the loss of electricity in many communities, moose meat which had been frozen is now spoiled. Fish are typically preserved by drying on racks for the winter, but now much of that subsistence food has been spoiled by seawater and flooding and is beginning to mildew. Much of it will become inedible.

To be very clear: during the winter, many families in Western Alaska rely solely or overwhelmingly upon the fish and game they harvested themselves and packed into their freezers. To lose these vital stores of food just as winter is setting in poses a serious risk to not only human life but to communities as a whole – in many places, there are only one small village store with exorbitantly high prices, and no easy way to replace this food. But some of those stores have been damaged as well.

Inundated housing is another immediate need that must be met. Many homes, aging and overcrowded to begin with, are now filled with sand and water. We strongly encourage you to work closely with the Association of Alaska Housing Authorities, which represents the 14 Tribally Designated Housing Entities serving nearly 200 tribal communities in addressing this need. They already have “boots on the ground” and can be a major resource in this effort. Colleen Duskin is the executive director of the Association. She may be reached at:

Colleen Duskin  
4300 Boniface Parkway  
Anchorage, AK 99504  
Desk (907) 330-8398  
Cell (907) 250-5261  
[cduskin@aahaak.org](mailto:cduskin@aahaak.org)

Few of these communities are connected to traditional electric grid systems as in the Lower 48; many villages and communities receive electricity only through their own micro-grids, and nearly all of them are powered by diesel fuel. In some cases, the bulk fuel tank for diesel has been destroyed or is in danger of becoming inoperable because of erosion. The loss of a power plant or its fuel tanks thus eliminates the availability of electricity except for the very few who have their own small generators and sufficient fuel. The federal response must understand these unique conditions and the urgency they place upon swift and innovative federal action.

We know that Alaskans are not alone in facing the daunting task of rebuilding from disaster. Our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico now must themselves rebuild from a catastrophic storm, and we were glad to see you swiftly sign a federal disaster declaration. We stand in solidarity with all communities in need of disaster assistance, and we ask you to respond just as quickly to Alaska's request.

We are working with Alaska's Congressional delegation to address the broad scope of issues that will arise from this situation, including a need for emergency supplemental disaster appropriations to address our very unique needs. FEMA cannot do the job alone. This work will depend on many federal agency partners to get the job done. I urge your Administration to support such an emergency supplemental request to accompany the Continuing Resolution at the end of this month.

Additionally, we have reached out to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, as well as other federal officials, to communicate the terrible toll upon our communities that will impact their ability to meet ongoing oversight and reporting obligations for federal grants that they currently manage. It is hard to imagine how a community without power, sanitation, or functioning broadband can meet reporting deadlines or maintain their competitiveness to apply for new rounds of essential grant funding. These investments are key to strong communities. We ask that your Administration consider the tremendous hardships placed upon Alaskans at this time and work with us to make certain that no Alaska community faces further hardship by being punished or disadvantaged for the literal inability to manage paperwork while fighting to restore their homes and communities.

Another immediate action you could take would be to issue guidance to every federal agency to permit tribal organizations to submit grant applications for Indian Tribes with their permission, a cost-effective practice already widely embraced by the Department of Treasury and the Department of Commerce. I am enclosing a copy of our letter to OMB Director Shalanda Young outlining our specific requests.

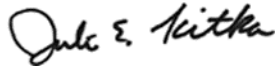
Thank you for your consideration, understanding, and compassion during this incredibly difficult time. We are grateful for the work your Administration has done and will do to assist Alaskans in their hour of need. Please keep us informed on what actions are planned and how we can assist in this recovery and restoration effort. Just like the pandemic, it will take all of us working together as a team to overcome this disaster.

President Biden  
(20SEP22)

Typhoon Merbok  
Page 4 of 4

I am at your service. Please feel free to reach out to me at any time if there is anything AFN can do to assist in Alaska's recovery. I can be reached at [jkitka@nativefederation.org](mailto:jkitka@nativefederation.org) or (907) 227-6642.

Sincerely,



Julie Kitka  
President

Cc: The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, United States Senator  
The Honorable Dan Sullivan, United States Senator  
The Honorable Mary Peltola, Congresswoman for All Alaska