

ASSOCIATION OF VILLAGE COUNCIL PRESIDENTS

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**Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP)
Disaster and Emergency Response Recommendations
Prepared for the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs (SCIA)
Chair Senator Lisa Murkowski
Thaddeus Tikiun, Jr., Chairman, AVCP Executive Board
May 7, 2026 — YKHC, Blueberry Conference Room**

Chair Murkowski, thank you for convening this roundtable. I am Thaddeus Tikiun, Jr., Chairman of the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) Executive Board. I am Yup'ik and serve on the Executive Board of the Orutsararmiut Traditional Native Council (ONC). AVCP is the largest Tribal consortium in the Nation, representing 56 federally recognized Tribes in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

We operate across extreme rural Alaska, or what we call extreme remote America. In our region, there is no road system. We travel between villages by snow machines and 4-wheelers over very long distances, in harsh weather, and with limited communication.

AVCP delivers federal and state programs to our Tribes, and most of our staff live in the villages we serve. When Typhoon Halong hit, Tribal governments, YKHC, the school system, our VPSO and emergency response program, and volunteers carried out the early response. The typhoon did not create gaps in emergency management in our region; it exposed them.

My message today is simple: we cannot keep responding to Arctic typhoons and other disasters with a patchwork system and expect it to work. We need a tribally led, region-wide emergency response structure built for Western Alaska. We need Congress to not only authorize legislation to support emergency response, but also to fund a Western Alaska Emergency Response System.

Here are the key lessons from Halong that I would like to put on the record today:

- 1) We need to build real-time coordination and communications that work when systems fail.** Halong showed that early warning is not well done and not enough. Before Typhoon Halong, our region did not have the appropriate warning that the lower 48 communities would have had. Thankfully, our AVCP staff had recently convened a rural resiliency workshop where we had Tribal Leader contact information.

Nunaput umyuallgutkut pinirluteng-Ilu, Tegganerput qigcikliki pirqakluki-Ilu, ayagyuaput-Ilu ciuliqagcimaup yuuyarakun.
Our Tribes are united and strong, our Elders are respected and valued, and our youth are guided by Yuuyaraq.

Akiachak, Akiak, Alakanuk, Andreafski, Aniak, Atnautluak, Bethel, Bill Moore's Sl., Chefomak, Chevak, Chuathbaluk, Chuloonawick, Crooked Creek, Eek, Emmonak, Georgetown, Goodnews Bay, Hamilton, Hooper Bay, Lower Kalskag, Upper Kalskag, Kasigluk, Kipnuk, Kongiganak, Kodik, Kwethluk, Kwigillingok, Lime Village, Marshall, Mekoryuk, Mtn. Village, Napaimute, Napakiak, Napaskiak, Newtok, Nighthute, Nunakauyak, Nunam Iqua, Nunapitchuk, Ohogamiut, Oscarville, Paimiut, Pilot Station, Pitka's Point, Platinum, Quinhagak, Red Devil, Russian Mission, Scammon Bay, Sleetmute, St. Mary's, Stony River, Tuluksak, Tuntutuliak, Tununak, Umkumiut

When phones and the internet fail, villages can become isolated, and decisions get made without a shared picture of what is happening across the Delta. Our staff at AVCP were able to contact Tribal members who were floating away in their homes, because children were using TikTok to ping their locations. We should have a better system than that.

- a. **Local capacity is life safety.** On a normal day in our region, public safety is inconsistent, and response times are long. During Halong, evacuation and life-safety decisions fell to Tribal leaders and volunteers. We cannot rely on luck in the next storm.
- b. **We need to create a common operating picture.** We need a standing, tribally informed system for rapid impact reporting and redundant communications. We also need emergency preparedness standards. We need a plan for food distribution, potable water systems, backup power, and evacuation and shelter systems that work for our region. We need air access and airport preparedness so that outside partners do not have to learn conditions while the response is already underway. We need a sensible, coordinated system.

2) We need to fund preparedness that can scale. What does that look like? Regional and subregional logistics that will support our region and every community in it.

Every community needs the basics to stay safe through a storm, and the region needs the ability to move people and supplies quickly.

- At the Regional and subregional level, we need: a plan for backup fuel and power, emergency water systems, redundant communications, pre-positioned equipment and supplies, staging space, and a hub-and-spoke logistics system for evacuation, sheltering, and resupply that will serve each community.
- For People and access we need: recurring training/exercises built around Tribal leadership, clinics, schools, and volunteers, and sustained investment in village airports as the lifeline for evacuation and emergency operations.

3) We are asking you to invest in resilient infrastructure and household recovery, so families can stay home.

Halong damaged homes, displaced entire communities, split up families, damaged utilities and fuel systems, and the equipment families rely on for subsistence. It also destroyed food that was stored up for the winter, where families lost freezers full of food. Recovery must cover both community infrastructure and household losses, not just one or the other.

- a. **We need to protect burial sites.** Erosion and flooding threaten grave sites. In our culture, burial sites are sacred sites. Tribes need resources for assessment, protection, and respectful relocation when necessary. We need funding to protect our burial sites.

4) We need to deliver disaster programs in ways that work in rural Alaska, and we need the best model to do that.

Halong reinforced that disaster assistance cannot

assume broadband, paperwork capacity, or proximity to agency staff. We need in-person support, culturally appropriate assistance, and formal partnerships with Tribes and Tribal organizations. A major challenge for our Tribes displaced in Anchorage was communication. We needed interpreters to assist with communicating needs and providing culturally relevant assistance. This should have been a given, not an afterthought. We needed a coordinated access point for assistance, and the process should have been easier.

AVCP supports the **TERRA Act** as drafted because it aligns with what Western Alaska needs: coordinated emergency response, infrastructure support, and investment in local capacity, all built to also support communities like ours in remote America.

5) We need to fix rural public safety and build Western Alaska Emergency Response and Public Safety Systems to coordinate response. Public safety is our number one priority. In our region, 48 communities currently rely on 13 VPSOs. If a typhoon were to hit our 24 coastal communities, 4 VPSOs would be available to help coordinate evacuation for roughly 10,000 people in a major emergency. In our region, search and rescue is volunteer-run and largely unfunded. That is not a disaster system. Yet it is what we have.

AVCP is proposing to build a system called the Western Alaska Public Safety and Emergency Response System (WAPSERS), through support and partnership at the state and federal levels, including the Denali Commission. The WAPSERS system aims to close these very real gaps we are facing. For example, we currently face a patchwork of law enforcement, a lack of real emergency coordination, and a last-minute response to disasters. The dual-use emergency response system will focus on a tribally led model. It will have a central hub in Bethel with 5 subregional response centers. I will also have coordinated redundant communications and shared logistics for evacuations and resupply. It will strengthen public safety and emergency response during disasters.

We are asking for permanent, recurring appropriations to fund officer staffing, housing, modern facilities, redundant communications, and basic Search and Rescue support so responders can do the job safely and effectively.

Chair Murkowski, our asks are straightforward: (1) support TERRA Act and invest in infrastructure and preparedness built for remote Alaska or what we call extreme remote America; (2) make permanent investments in rural public safety, communications, and Search and Rescue; and (3) support AVCP's proposal for the Western Alaska Public Safety and Emergency Response system.

We know that it's not a matter of if the next disaster will come, but when.

In my culture, elders tell us to always be ready. We should have our boats. We should have our gas. We should have our nets. We should have our fish to feed our families. We should always have our resources ready to handle any circumstances that come our way.

Upingaurluta. Let's be ready.

Thank you.