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July 24, 2009

The Honorable Dallas Tonsager
Under Secretary
Rural Development
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW, Room 205-W
Washington, DC 20250-0107

Dear Mr. Tonsager:

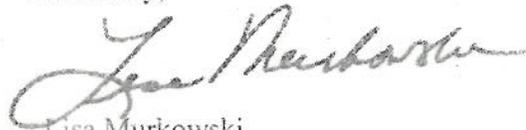
Thank you for meeting with me yesterday regarding the Village Safe Water program. I appreciate your commitment to working to ensure that this program succeeds. As we discussed, I am particularly interested in ways that we can streamline the current grant-making processes to move individual projects forward and accelerate the delivery of Federal aid into our villages.

In order to ensure that we do not lose momentum, I would like to suggest that our staffs – along with staff from the State of Alaska, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and the Indian Health Service and Environmental Protection Agency water programs – meet over August to explore the legislative and administrative options to simplify and improve the current process.

The current process is clearly not working, as evidenced by the large unobligated balances in the rural water funds. I am committed to seeing this change. The Village Safe Water program is too important, and the need is too great, to allow government bureaucracy – whether on the state or Federal level – to impede progress.

Again, I appreciate your personal attention to this issue, and I know that we share the same goal when it comes to providing this needed aid to our rural communities. I want to renew my invitation to come to Alaska to see firsthand the important work of the Village Safe Water program and how much work still remains.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator