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Communities Served

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| Alakanuk | Nightmute |
| Ambler | Noatak |
| Andreafsky | Noorvik |
| Anvik | Nulato |
| Brevig Mission | Nunapitchuk |
| Chevak | Old Harbor |
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| Emmonak | Quinhagak |
| Gambell | Russian Mission |
| Goodnews Bay | St. Mary's |
| Grayling | St. Michael |
| Holy Cross | Savoonga |
| Hooper Bay | Scammon Bay |
| Huslia | Selawik |
| Kaltag | Shageluk |
| Kasigluk | Shaktoolik |
| Kiana | Shishmaref |
| Kivalina | Shungnak |
| Kotlik | Stebbins |
| Koyuk | Teller |
| Lower Kalskag | Togiak |
| Marshall | Toksook Bay |
| Mekoryuk | Tununak |
| Minto | Upper Kalskag |
| Mt. Village | Wales |
| New Stuyahok | |



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Cabinet Members Tour Western Alaska

August 12, 2009, was a historic day for rural Alaska. That was the day that four Cabinet secretaries—Tom Vilsack, agriculture; Steven Chu, energy; Arne Duncan, education; Shaun Donovan, housing and urban development—and Sen. Mark Begich, Gov. Sean Parnell and many other dignitaries visited Bethel and Hooper Bay.

Nothing went according to plan. The secretaries were supposed to arrive in Bethel at 8:15 a.m. and a town hall session was supposed to start at 9 a.m., followed by press time, break-out sessions and finally, a tour to Hooper Bay and back.

As it turned out, the secretaries didn't get to Bethel until after 11 a.m. and the town hall session began at noon. About 400 people attended, primarily from the Calista region but broadly representing almost all rural Alaska areas. Although the time was short, I believe the visitors learned a lot about the challenges that our communities face every day with necessities that are taken for granted elsewhere.

Later that afternoon, the dignitaries and a host of others, including me, flew to Hooper Bay—AVEC's largest community. Another town hall was conducted at the new Hooper Bay School, with the secretaries getting a firsthand review of the local challenges—education, housing, sanitation, water supply, energy, transportation and medical services among others.

It was a highlight of their trip when the delegation visited the new Hooper Bay wind turbines to see the three 100-kilowatt machines turning in the gentle breeze. They learned the turbine installations cost \$1 million each, three to four times what it would cost in the Lower 48, primarily because of the cost of transportation coupled with the cost of the foundations.

They also learned wind turbines can only displace about 20 percent to 30 percent of the diesel used to generate electricity, and that diesel and gasoline costs \$5 or more in rural Alaska—as much as \$15 a gallon in villages accessible only by air.

It was a sobering visit and an informative one. I believe the Obama administration knows a lot more today about our challenges in rural Alaska than they did a few weeks ago. I hope they will remember the task of building code-compliant tank farms and power plants in rural Alaska is far from done, and that the Denali Commission and the Rural Utilities Service need continued funding to continue the good work they have done the past 10 years.

Until next time,

Meera Kohler
President and CEO