

New Mexico, Nevada, or Washington State. So this would not be the first time you would have a small, narrow road through a refuge area.

It is also ignorant. It is ignorant of the fact that human lives have been lost in King Cove as medevacs were attempted in bad weather. We have had a total of 19 people who have died since 1980, either in plane crashes or because they didn't last before they could be taken out.

The decision of the Department of the Interior was cynical. It was callous. It devastated the people of King Cove, who finally thought help was on the way. It shattered the trust responsibility the Federal Government is supposed to have to our Native people, and it has left these people in the same situation they have been in for decades now. They are at the mercy of the elements. They have the potential to suffer needless pain, perhaps even death, if they should have a medical emergency.

People have said to me: Well, LISA, there are lots of places in Alaska where it is really tough to get in and out of, where weather shuts you down and you are not connected by a road. So why is King Cove so different, so special? It is not that they are so different or so special; it is that there is an easier answer that is right there. In many of the communities, there is not an easier answer. Again, we are talking about a small connector road that could be the answer here.

It has been nearly 1,000 days since Secretary Jewell decided just to wash her hands of this issue. She promised the local residents she was going to figure out a way to help them gain reliable transportation to Cold Bay. Instead of working toward a real solution, she has decided to run the clock out. We have seen no engagement with local residents, no budget request, no administrative action, just one topical study of alternatives. And this alternative is one that has been examined before and rejected before as unworkable.

As chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I held an oversight hearing earlier this year, and the Presiding Officer had an opportunity to hear from the residents of King Cove, to hear what they have gone through, the anguish this has caused their community. We heard about King Cove's decades-long fight for a lifesaving road from its mayor and from its spokeswoman of the Agdaagux Tribe. We heard strong support for the road from Alaska's Lieutenant Governor, a member of the Democratic Party and an Alaskan Native. We also heard from a representative of the National Congress of American Indians.

We also heard some really unsettling things. We heard about the Valium dispenser at the local medical clinic, where many of the residents who have such anxiety and stress about flying—because of the hazards of flying out of this little strip—are given two pills out

of these dispensaries, one for the flight out of King Cove and one for when they return.

We also heard from a retired Coast Guard commander who led a mission to locate a plane crash that killed four individuals, including a fisherman who was being medevaced out because of an amputated foot. The commander told us about the horror of finding these bodies still upright, belted into their seats, with limbs that were frozen and could not be untangled—a memory you just don't ever forget.

King Cove has now had a total of 51 more medevacs—51 more medevacs—since Secretary Jewell's decision in December of 2013 when she rejected this road. Our U.S. Coast Guard has carried out 17 of those medevacs, risking their own crews to rescue those in need. We thank them for that, though that is not the Coast Guard's mission. But they are there when you call them.

Those patients who have been medevaced have been individuals in terrible pain and trauma. One man had dislocated both hips when a 600-pound crab pot fell on him. We have had elderly residents with internal bleeding or sepsis or apparent heart attacks. We had an infant baby boy who was struggling to breathe.

Just this past month—we think: Oh, summertime, August, good weather. This was a bad month for King Cove. No fewer than four medevacs have been carried out. One was an elderly woman who arrived at the medical clinic with a hip fracture. She needed to be medevaced to Anchorage but had to wait for more than 40 hours because the heavy fog on the ground would not lift.

So that is what is happening in King Cove without a lifesaving road. And I know, Mr. President, that King Cove, AK, is a long way from where we are here. Many in this Chamber—most in this Chamber—will never go there. Most people in America will not ever go there. But as remote as they are, as small as this community is, I would remind my colleagues this is still an American community. These are Americans. These are people who deserve to have our help, and it is our job to assist them. They are not asking for much.

We should not let this continue. The people of King Cove are suffering, and it is entirely within our power to protect them. My amendment, and what I have offered in legislation and in amendments, is an opportunity, after decades of waiting and delay and frustration and pain, to finally authorize a short, one-lane, gravel, noncommercial-use road.

As I mentioned, I am not going to be raising my amendment to a vote on the WRDA bill, but I do want the Senate to understand it is well past time to help the good people of King Cove. We need to ensure they have reliable access to emergency medical transportation, and we need to do it this year so that we can put an end to the dangers, an end to the anxiety, an end to the suffering

this community is enduring because of a decision by our own Federal Government.

With that, Mr. President, I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DAINES). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONSTITUTION WEEK

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, for the last 229 years, one document has shaped our system of government and embodied the character of our country. It has guided us through crisis and promoted our national ideals of equal justice, limited government, and the rule of law.

I speak, of course, of the U.S. Constitution. More than two centuries ago, the Founders met to write it in the same Pennsylvania State House, now called Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was signed and where George Washington received his commission as commander of the Continental Army.

The Constitution was drafted in 1787 and signed in that year on September 17. That is why this coming week of September 17 to the 23 is Constitution Week, a time we set aside to commemorate this revered document.

During Constitution Week, we teach the history of our Constitution and of America's promise of liberty for all to the younger generations. One organization that has taken the lead in helping young Kentuckians learn about the Constitution is the Bryan Station chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution. Located in Lexington, the Bryan Station NSDAR will reach out to several schools in the area to help students understand the historical significance of our guiding document.

They will work to educate students of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. They will show them how the Constitution lays the foundation for our country's heritage of liberty. And they will encourage students to study the historical events which led to the drafting of the Constitution and its signing on September 17, 1787.

So in commemoration of Constitution Week 2016, I want to commend the Bryan Station NSDAR for their commitment to civic participation and civic education in the Commonwealth. I want to recognize all the students, teachers, and community leaders in Kentucky and across the Nation who are working to spread an understanding of the Constitution and the ideals it symbolizes.

I also want to especially recognize and thank the men and women in uniform who swear an oath to defend our

Constitution, particularly those who serve in Kentucky at Fort Knox, Fort Campbell, the Blue Grass Army Depot, or as Reservists or members of the National Guard. Without their service and sacrifice, we would not enjoy the liberties enshrined in this historical document.

As Abraham Lincoln once said, ours is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. The Constitution begins with the very words, "We the people." It ensures that, in America, power is dependent on the consent of the people. And that principle has helped to build a nation that represents the greatest hope for freedom around the world.

TRIBUTE TO MARGARET HOULIHAN SMITH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today I want to congratulate a former member of my Senate staff, Margaret Houlihan Smith. Margaret served as my Chicago director and previously as a senior member of my 1996 campaign team. Since 2004, Margaret has served as director of corporate and government affairs for United Airlines, responsible for advancing its legislative objectives and protecting its commercial interests in Illinois.

Next week, Margaret is receiving the *Rerum Novarum* Award at St. Joseph College Seminary in Chicago. The *Rerum Novarum* Award, or Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor, is named after an encyclical written by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 that addressed issues facing the working class. Specifically, *Rerum Novarum*'s fundamental principles are respect for the dignity of every person and their labor, the right to organize and belong to a union, and the right to a living wage.

Every year, on behalf of St. Joseph College Seminary, the Seminary Salutes Committee honors men and women who have supported these ideals in the Chicagoland area. Well, I want to tell you that the committee couldn't have made a better choice than Margaret Houlihan Smith.

Margaret learned the importance of these values and public service from her father, Dan Houlihan. Known as Dan-the-man to his constituents—he represented the South Side of Chicago—the Beverly neighborhood—in the Illinois House of Representatives. Public service was in Margaret's blood.

So it is no surprise that, after graduating from St. Mary's College in Winona, MN, Margaret started right at the top in Illinois politics and began working for Michael Madigan, Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives. In 1995, she helped run my first Senate campaign. And in 1996, Margaret agreed to be the director of my Chicago office. Her boundless energy, quick wit, and great judgment made her an outstanding member of my staff and set a high bar for those that followed.

One day, while working in my Chicago office, Margaret lost her voice.

When she tried to talk, she croaked like a frog. Her doctor urged her to stop talking for about a week. But anyone that knows Margaret knows this would be a challenge. You see, Margaret is the definition of an Irish lass: a wonderful sense of humor and, above all, a great storyteller—so great that she never stops telling stories. And let me assure you, her doctor's urgings didn't stop her. But I couldn't be more proud that Margaret is still out there sharing stories and lending her voice to the issues that matter in her community.

Margaret is driven by a willingness to offer a helping hand and is one of the most generous people I have had the pleasure to know. In her spare time, she serves on the boards of Misericordia Heart of Mercy, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Irish Fellowship of Chicago, the Civic Federation, and the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce PAC Board. If that wasn't enough, Margaret is also a founding member of the Illinois Women's Institute for Leadership.

She is an extraordinarily accomplished professional, but it is her caring heart that makes Margaret such a deserving recipient of this award. For more than a decade, Margaret has served on the Seminary Salutes Committee, tirelessly advocating for the St. Joseph College Seminary. Year after year, she works to raise money and vocation awareness in Chicagoland. And because of her efforts, the Seminary Salutes annual fundraising event, which benefits the scholarship program for low-income students, continues to be a success. I am honored to congratulate her on all the work she has done for St. Joseph College Seminary.

Despite her many achievements, her proudest accomplishment is her family. Never forgetting where she comes from—a trait her father and his beloved wife of 50 years, Mary Alice Houlihan, instilled in her—Margaret lives in the Beverly neighborhood of Chicago with her husband, Jim, and their two children: 8-year-old son Jack and 6-year-old daughter Maeve.

Let me close with this: Margaret's father used to have a favorite saying—"He has a big hat size." It was Dan's way to describe someone who was full of themselves. Well, Margaret has never forgotten those words and always stayed humble. I couldn't be more proud of the work she has done and the person she has become. And although her father is no longer with us, I know he feels the same way.

Congratulations, Margaret, on a well-deserved honor.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, for 2 years, President Obama's five eminently qualified nominees to the U.S. Court of Federal Claims have been awaiting a vote. This court has been referred to as the "keeper of the na-

tion's conscience" and "the People's Court." It was created by Congress approximately 160 years ago and embodies the constitutional principle that individuals have rights against their government. As President Lincoln said, "It is as much the duty of Government to render prompt justice against itself, in favor of citizens, as it is to administer the same between private individuals." That is what this Court does: it allows citizens to seek prompt justice against our government.

Yet 2 years of obstruction by a single Senator, the junior Senator from Arkansas, has forced the court to operate without one-third of its allotted judges. While these five nominees have been waiting for a vote, another judge retired, leaving the court with only 10 judges for 16 seats, or a vacancy rate of 38 percent. This takes Senate Republican obstruction of judicial nominees to a new level.

The court's jurisdiction is authorized by statute, and it primarily hears monetary claims against the U.S. Government deriving from the Constitution, Federal statutes, executive regulations, and civilian or military contracts. For example, the court has presided over such important cases as the savings and loan crisis of the 1980s and the World War II internment of Japanese-Americans. It also presides over civilian and military pay claims and money claims under the Fifth Amendment's Takings Clause.

I have heard no objections to the qualifications of any of the five nominees to this court. One of these nominees, Armando Bonilla, would be the first Hispanic judge to hold a seat on the Court. He is endorsed by the Hispanic National Bar Association. He has spent his entire career—now spanning over two decades—as an attorney for the Department of Justice. He was hired out of law school in the Department's prestigious honors program and has risen to become the Associate Deputy Attorney General in the Department. Mr. Bonilla should be confirmed without further delay.

Another nominee, Jeri Somers, also has a long record of public service. She served her country in the Air Force, retiring with the rank of lieutenant colonel. She spent over two decades serving first as a judge advocate general and then as a military judge in the U.S. Air Force and the District of Columbia's Air National Guard. In 2007, she became a board judge with the U.S. Civilian Board of Contract Appeals and currently serves as its vice chair.

Armando Bonilla and Jeri Somers are just two of the five nominees that Senate Republicans have been denying a confirmation vote. These are two individuals that have done right every step of the way in their careers and are willing to serve the American people on this important Court. They have dedicated the majority of their careers in service to our Nation. They deserve better than the treatment they are receiving from the Senate.