



Governor Michael J. Dunleavy
STATE OF ALASKA

April 17, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

RE: Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney

Dear Mr. President and Secretary Bernhardt,

Assistant Secretary Sweeney is a daughter of Alaska and I unequivocally support her. Alaskans were, and continue to be, grateful for your nomination of her to fill such an important position. Alaska is proud that the United States Senate unanimously confirmed Ms. Sweeney in June 2018 and she began serving our country as the first Native Alaskan, and second woman, to oversee the Bureau of Indian Affairs. She is uniquely qualified for this position in that Alaska is the state with the highest percentage of Native Americans. Ms. Sweeney has performed this role admirably and with tireless dedication.

It is extremely concerning that there are some tribal entities calling for her to be removed from office because they blame her for accurately implementing the recently passed Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). Assistant Secretary Sweeney followed the legal requirements to begin disbursement of much needed financial relief to Native American Tribal entities, as described within the Act, to relieve the impact and devastating consequences of responding to the Covid-19 disease. Those who have targeted Tara are unwilling to equitably share in the resources provided by the CARES Act funding. Instead, they want more of the resources for themselves. It is hard to believe some would take such a position given this incredibly difficult time our country is facing.

Tara has performed her job with consistency and professionalism; following the letter of the law in implementing the CARES provision applying to Indian tribes. Her opponents argue that Alaska Native Regional and Village Corporations (ANC) should not receive funding under CARES. They argue that the ANCs have no right to the funds because the ANCs do not qualify under CARES as they were created by separate legislation. That is incorrect.

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In 1971, Congress enacted the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) to settle land claims in Alaska and to create native regional and village corporations. These ANCs have operated successfully since 1971, employing thousands of American citizens and providing benefits for the members of each entity. Just like every entity in America, our ANCs and Alaska Tribes have been devastated by the impacts of dealing with the Covid-19 epidemic.

The CARES Act clearly included the ANCs as recognized governing bodies of an Indian tribe by incorporating the definition of Indian Tribe contained in the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act passed in 1975. Section 5304 (e) of that law states:

(e) "Indian Tribe" means any Indian Tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community, including any Alaska Native village or regional or village corporation as defined in or pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Act (85 Stat 688) which is recognized as eligible for the special programs and services provided by the United States to Indians because of their status as Indians.

Clearly, this Congress intended to include ANCs in the tribal relief funding contained in the CARES act. The ANCs have been harmed by the Covid-19 epidemic and need the support provided by their fair share of the CARES Act funding. If Congress had intended that ANCS not be included, it would have stated that clearly. It did not. Tara Sweeney is implementing the plain meaning of the statute and simply doing her job.

Mr. President and Mr. Secretary, it is so unfortunate that some choose to take an unfair opportunity to try and distract from your Administration's efforts to keep Americans safe and our economy as sound as possible during this unprecedented attack from an invisible virus. An effort that all of us must participate in to make our defense as strong as it can be. I believe Assistant Secretary Sweeney is doing her part to make that happen.

I urge you to keep her in her position. She deserves no less. I began by naming Tara as a daughter of Alaska, and that is true, but more importantly, she is a Native Alaskan, a Native American, proud of her heritage, and a tireless dedicated civil servant.

Assistant Secretary Tara Sweeney has my utmost confidence.

Sincerely,



Mike Dunleavy
Governor

cc: The Honorable Dan Sullivan, United States Senate
The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, United States Senate
The Honorable Don Young, United States House of Representatives