



For release: October 26, 2018

Contact: Nils Andreassen, nils@akml.org, 907-790-5305

Alaska's local leaders speak with White House officials

Alaska's local government officials traveled to Washington, D.C. this week at the invitation of the White House. Alaska Municipal League members met with administration officials on Tuesday, October 23, as part of the last round of "State Days," which have been convened for the first time under President Trump. With this visit by Alaska, Hawai'i and California, more than 3,000 local government leaders from all 50 states have participated.

Alaska leaders heard from four cabinet members, other White House officials, and the President. This was one of the strongest programs of any of the state days, with a robust group of speakers, the majority of whom were very familiar with Alaska and Alaska issues. As the President noted, this opportunity gave the administration a chance to hear from and respond to community officials.

Secretary Ryan Zinke, Department of the Interior, focused his remarks on restructuring within DOI, and aligning between agencies the coordination of recreation, conservation and permitting. Secretary Zinke highlighted energy development, active forest management, as well as support for the Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act.

Department of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao similarly focused on the need to streamline and speed up permitting, which would be helped by accurate cost estimates up front, including for life cycle and local share amounts. Secretary Chao mentioned asset recycling, new ways of funding projects, one federal decision, and the interest in rural America.

On the opioid response, Kellyanne Conway noted that opioid legislation had passed with bipartisan support, that investment was increasing and that focus will also be needed on prevention education.

Andrew Wheeler, Administrator of the EPA, reviewed some of the numbers that the U.S. has been able to achieve, both to increase economic development and reduce pollution. Striking the balance between the two was clearly a priority. One of the ways that states can have more of a role and say is through converting FIPS to SIPS – air quality implementation plans from federal to state. EPA is working on a new WOTUS definition, which should be available for comment soon, and they'll be working on guidance for partnership with regions.

Finally, Secretary Robert Wilkie, Department of Veterans Affairs, had just returned from AFN, which he considered a very special occasion. Secretary Wilkie discussed reforms within VA, which is the second largest federal department. He mentioned testing electronic records in Alaska, a focus on suicide prevention, and the importance of VA housing vouchers.

AML President Pat Branson, Mayor, City of Kodiak, noted that "contacts and information made during this DC visit were invaluable for getting informed about a possible new infrastructure bill favorable to municipalities, a huge contact list of federal administration officials making it easier to get questions answered and issues known, and even President Trump telling the group to contact him directly."

Overall, the tone was collaborative, with a consistent theme of searching for efficiency, system reform and outcomes that are responsive to local interests. Alaskans were able to ask questions, reference outstanding issues, and voice appreciation for decisions that had benefits to local government. This was an important opportunity to ensure that Alaskans are heard at the highest level, and a great way to learn more about meaningful engagement with federal agencies and officials.