



**Address to the 5th Annual Alaska
Tribal Transportation Symposium
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Deal or No Deal?

Good morning, everyone, and Dan Moreno, thank you for your kind introduction. This is a very important symposium and gathering of people who care about the future of our rural communities. We're pleased to be invited and to work with you.

How many of you saw *Deal or No Deal* last evening on Channel 2? This is a great story! I saw the first few minutes while waiting for Pen Air in King Salmon. We are thrilled for Heidi Kurtz and her family.

Here we are, we all struggle to effectively tell Alaska's story to national policy makers and to our fellow citizens in the lower 48, and this young Alaskan blazes like a supernova on our television screens to not only endear herself to a national audience, but win \$204,000 with the support and love of her family and friends. She was a wonderful spokesperson for herself, her family, her Yup'ik culture and for all Alaskans. My hope is that she continues to take a visible role – in fact, as you consider keynote speakers for your next year's conference, invite her!

The Denali Commission is also a great story. In fact, we dedicated our very first rural Alaskan office yesterday in Naknek. Dolly Ann Trefon has joined our team as our Travel Administrator, and is working from our office housed in the Naknek Electric

Association's headquarters. The Commission is passionate about improving life in rural Alaska, and by using the capabilities of the Internet; we are able to actually able to walk our talk in a new way.

But telling our story remains challenging. Just a month ago, in Washington DC, I met with a congressional staff member for the first time representing one of our funding sources, who looked me in the eye, shook my hand and said "Welcome to the States!" I waited, he recovered and said "Oh my gosh,..." And I said, "Yes, we were admitted to the Union in 1959...but we'll get past this..." And we had a wonderful visit.

The Denali Commission Transportation Program is off to a terrific start, thanks to many of you here today. I give great credit to the Alaska Federation of Natives and to leaders like Senator Albert Kookesh, who conceived of this program. They saw the urgent need to focus not only attention, but real dollars, towards attacking the deplorable conditions of many of our village's roads, boardwalks, trails, barge landings, docks and harbors. Our Congressional delegation did a superb job of creating this program inside SAFETI-LU, authorizing and appropriating about \$100 million over a four-year period. Without this program, the needs of our rural





communities will continue to be lost in the equally important need to improve our state highway systems, the state ferry system, the Dalton Highway and urban arterials.

Our success is partially based on the SAFETEA-LU requirement that the program have a Transportation Advisory Committee, comprised of eight rural Alaskans, to advise Denali Commission on program policies and to recommend specific projects. I'm privileged to chair this group, which includes prominent Alaska Native leaders like Steve Ivanoff from Unalakleet, who is here this morning – Steve, thank for everything you do, Mike Hoffman from Bethel, Ray Koonuk from Point Hope, Norm Phillips and Charles Quinlan from Fairbanks, and Walter Sampson from Kotzebue. Other members of this outstanding group are Randy Romenesko from Nome and Chuck Pool from Ketchikan.

From the beginning, this committee has focused on the urgent need to improve health and safety in our rural communities. Through a public process, they recommended over 43 projects last year and 40 projects this year, including, for example, dust control in Fort Yukon, Cantwell, Circle/Circle City and Tanana,, boardwalk improvements in Napaskiak, Akiachak, Pelican and Nunam Iqua and dock and harbor improvements in Wainwright, Galena, Old Harbor and Coffman Cove. By carefully working with partners, our \$25 million in the first year leveraged another \$75 million for an effective total of \$100 million.

It's a team effort, and we rely on the expertise of our Program Manager Mike

McKinnon who has extensive experience and credibility throughout rural Alaska, and from Kathy Berzanske, another Denali Commission team member with great insights and skills into program development.

The Transportation Advisory Committee will be meeting for two days in Nome in June. We'll be catching our breath after two fast years in a retreat to consider where we've come, and how to make the most of the remaining two years of the program.

Success is also based on our many excellent program partners.

First, I want to recognize Karen Schmidt, the Deputy Administrator in Juneau for the Federal Highway Administration. Karen's help has been invaluable in both guiding program development and educating her colleagues in Washington DC on the wisdom of this program. She helped us explain to Federal Highway professionals in Washington DC, for example, what a boardwalk is, and why it's a critical feature of many of our rural communities, since they had visions of promenades along the boardwalk of Atlantic City.

What you may not realize is that Karen also recently retired in Pearl Harbor after a distinguished military career as an O-6 Captain in the US Naval Reserve. Karen, thank you for your service to our country.

Karen, and Vince Barone in Washington DC represent the Federal Highway Administration, through which our transportation dollars flow. We had an excellent meeting with the national administrator, Mr. Richard Capka, who, happily, understands Alaska.





He spent portions of his career in the state with the Corps of Engineers, and we've invited him to travel with us later this summer prior to joining many of you at Founder's Day in Metlakatla to cut the ribbon on the new Walden Point Road.

I echo Senator Kookesh's remarks on the creativity of the Walden Point project. This 14-mile road blasted through mountainous rock and forest by the military and co-funded by the Denali Commission is the largest Innovative Readiness Project ever constructed by our military. Credit goes to the leaders in Metlakatla and our congressional delegation for conceiving and executing this great program. While our global war on terror makes future projects like this more difficult to approve, I encourage others to look at the Metlakatla example to see what's possible in other regions of our state.

Senator Albert Kookesh, Chair of the Alaska Senate's Transportation Committee, is both a respected supporter and critic of the Denali Commission. I respect his role very much, and I want to assure him the Commission is working hard to live up to the very high standards he and other leaders expect.

And I'm very pleased the new Commissioner of the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, Leo von Scheben, is here today. I've worked with Leo for over 13 years, and if you're looking for new approaches to government, a perspective from the private sector, a leader to take this great agency to the next level, Governor Palin has made an excellent choice. Leo won't tell you this, but his company USKH, Inc. consis-

tently ranks within the top 100 architecture and engineering companies in the nation – not just for profitability, but for overall employee morale, innovation and performance. His Department is an integral partner for our transportation program, and we look forward to working even more closely together. The Commissioner is new to government, and I know he would appreciate your help as he works to understand government culture and the sometimes Byzantine processes of getting things done.

Linda Gerkie, Regional Deputy Administrator is here from the Federal Transit Administration. About \$5 million of our funding comes through FTA, and she has been instrumental in helping the Denali Commission implement this element of the transportation program.

Thanks to leaders like Loretta Bullard, the first tribal organization to become a major program partner is Kawerak, based in Nome. Kawerak has a very creditable transportation program covering the Bering Straits region and this agreement lets them participate directly in funding and program execution. Through their extra efforts, we now have a process in place to help us establish working relationships with other tribal entities throughout the state.

In fact, I'm pleased to announce we are signing an agreement this morning for road improvements with the Craig Indian Association. I thank Millie Stevens and Sam Thomas for their work in negotiating a great agreement with the Commission.

We're also working closely with offi-



cial of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, like newly confirmed Assistant Secretary Carl Artman, and Alaska Transportation Director Peggy Exendine. We're convinced a partnership between the Denali Commission and the BIA makes great sense, particularly when we can leverage the power of our funding with tribal shares to make a difference.

These are all wonderful and noteworthy accomplishments that show the power of working together. However, we face many challenges ahead.

First, this program is an experiment. The clock is ticking. We have only two more years to demonstrate success – that is, showing real change in enough communities to justify reauthorization. We have made remarkable progress to date, but we have more work to do.

Second, we need the State of Alaska to be a full program partner. Senator Stevens has been very direct in his message to the legislature to contribute towards Denali Commission funding as a true federal-state partnership. I am pleased to tell you that there is real progress on this front.

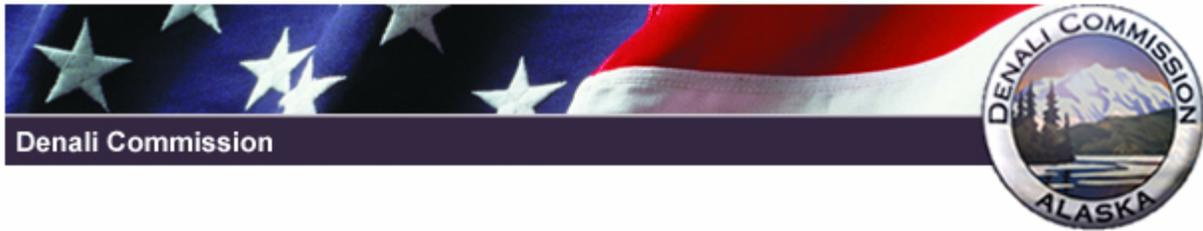
Third, although funding is critical, we need to continue to work together to find more innovative ways of developing joint venture projects. Our work in Unalakleet this summer is a great example. The state Department of Transportation & Public Facilities will be upgrading the airport, the Corps of Engineers will be improving a seawall and Kawerak, Inc. and the Denali Commission will be upgrading many local streets and roads. The innovation occurs because all par-

ties are coordinating together, so we can afford an asphalt batch plant. The result is that, instead of a temporary palliative to deal with dust control, these streets will be hard surfaced for the first time. This is smart business, and signals a model for other projects across the state.

Fourth, the Denali Commission is in the midst of vetting our 2007 Work Plan with the public and we can really use your ideas and comments. For those that don't know, our Work Plan is the Commission's blueprint for the year, providing direction on our programs and emphasis areas. Under our statute, after the Commission endorses the draft plan next Monday (April 9th) in Juneau, we'll publish the plan for 30 days in the Federal Register. The Commission will review all comments, make appropriate adjustments, and vote on the final plan in our meeting in Dillingham set for May 31st. I will then submit the plan to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval. Thus, you have a great opportunity to help the Commission set its course for the next year.

And finally, the key lesson we've learned is that this program will succeed because of support from local experts like you. We need to work together, so that in two short years, we can effectively demonstrate to national leaders that his program, this experiment, has truly made an important difference in the quality of life for enough of our rural communities, tribes and people that we can double, triple, or quadruple the funding next time around. Many of you have stated that this program is addressing needs that are sim-





ply not being addressed by other transportation programs, that the needs coming into the program will continue to grow, and we need to get this word back to the delegation and the transportation agencies, as the groundwork for the next transportation reauthorization legislation is being developed.

Just like Heidi Kurtz who made our hearts race with her skills in *Deal or No Deal*, we need national leaders to recognize the value of this program, the needs of our tribes, the promise of Alaska, and to give us a great Deal next time around.

Thank you very much.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George J. Canelos".

George J. Canelos
Federal Co-Chair