

## Association of Village Council Presidents Press Release

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Contact:  
Gage Hoffman  
907-543-7308  
ghoffman@avcp.org



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### **AVCP CEO Vivian Korthuis Welcoming Dr. Jill Biden to Bethel, Alaska**

Good afternoon,

My name is Vivian Korthuis. I serve as the Chief Executive Officer for the Association of Village Council Presidents. AVCP is a tribal consortium, and our membership are the 56 Tribes located along the Yukon River, Kuskokwim River, and the Bering Sea Coast in Western Alaska.

On behalf of AVCP and our Region's Tribes, I would like to welcome our special guest, Dr. Jill Biden; "welcome home" Representative Mary Peltola; and welcome Secretary Deb Holland.

As described by Dan and Kimberly, poverty is very real in our villages. We have many layers of challenges that face our people including the pandemic, public safety, the salmon crash and limited broadband.

Thank you to the Biden Administration for your efforts to address broadband in our region. AVCP has roughly 400 employees spread across over 40 villages. We provide a wide variety of essential social services to AVCP Region tribes and tribal members. Like most organizations, we have pivoted to remote work and reliance on web-based systems. It comes with a cost.

Our internet expenses have more than doubled in the past few years and the internet speeds are much slower than most any place in the country. In some of our villages, the internet is absent for long periods of time, preventing our efforts to fully digitize the application process for our services.

Our Region's Tribes have the same challenges. Poor connectivity interrupts everyday office work and basic communication with outside partners, including the State and Federal governments.

Connecting with the world through broadband is a significant issue, but our people are facing an even greater crisis as we try to connect with our Subsistence Way of Life.

We are facing a salmon crisis here in Western Alaska. Salmon is a fundamental part of our culture, our Way of Life and central to who we are as Yup'ik people. Due to climate change, warming oceans, and mismanagement of fisheries on the part of the State and the Federal Government, our people are going hungry.

This empty bag represents the empty smoke houses, freezers, and stomachs of more than 120,000 people in Western Alaska. I asked Dr. Biden to relay our urgent plea for help to the President. We know that the Biden Administration is keenly focused on the environment and the devastating impacts of climate change. I believe that the Salmon Crash is a test for the President's Arctic Strategy. It will take a "whole of government" approach to find solutions.

As Dr. Biden leaves Bethel, she will see that the Kuskokwim River is going through spring break up. She will also see some of our villages as she will fly over the mouth of the Kuskokwim River and head over the Bering Sea to Japan. We are literally located on the Northern Border of the United States. Alaska is at the geo-political center of the Arctic, and our tribes' and rural villages' issues are Arctic issues.

In closing, though there are many challenges, we live in one of the most beautiful places on earth-the Yukon Kuskowkim Delta in Western Alaska. Again, welcome to Bethel.

Quyana.

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*For additional information, please contact AVCP Communications Director, Gage Hoffman at 907-543-7308 or email at [ghoffman@avcp.org](mailto:ghoffman@avcp.org)*

*AVCP is a regional nonprofit tribal consortium comprised of the 56 federally recognized tribes of the YK Delta. The geographic boundaries of AVCP extend from the Yukon River Village of Russian Mission downstream to the Bering Sea coast, north up through Kotlik and south along the coastline to Platinum and then extending up the Kuskokwim River to Stony River, including Lime Village on the Stony River tributary. The area encompasses approximately 6.5 million acres, or 55,000 square miles, in Western Alaska.*