

Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
Federal Natural Disaster Response
May 6, 2026

Witnesses:

- [Thaddeus Tikiun, Jr.](#), Chairman of the Association of Village Presidents
- [Andrew Guy](#), President of Calista Corporation
- [Patty Smith](#), Interim President and CEO of Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corp.
- [Natasha Singh](#), President and CEO of Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium
- [Bryan Fisher](#), Director of the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management
- [Jocelyn Fenton](#), Director of Programs for Denali Commission

Highlights:

The Senate Indian Affairs field hearing found that while the immediate response to Typhoon Hailong relied heavily on Tribal, state, and nonprofit coordination, federal disaster systems remain fragmented, slow, and ill-suited for remote Alaska Native communities facing escalating climate impacts. Witnesses urged Congress to strengthen Tribally led preparedness, streamline federal coordination and funding, and make relocation and resilience investments eligible and accessible before repeated disasters cause further displacement and harm.

Key points:

- Unprecedented impacts and displacement
 - Example: Typhoon Hailong caused widespread infrastructure damage, contamination, food loss, and the largest domestic evacuation in Alaska’s history, with many residents still displaced months later.
- Strong response, weak coordination
 - While immediate response benefited from strong tribal, state, and nonprofit action, witnesses emphasized fragmented federal programs, unclear lead agencies, and slow funding delivery—especially for long-term recovery and housing.
- Need for Tribally led regional systems
 - Tribal leaders called for permanent, tribally led emergency response and public safety infrastructure (communications, search and rescue, logistics hubs), tailored to remote Alaska realities.
- Relocation must be an eligible option
 - Multiple witnesses urged Congress to authorize FEMA funding for community relocation when land is no longer safe, streamline land exchanges, and reduce bureaucratic barriers that delay lifesaving decisions.
- Preparedness over patchwork recovery

- Speakers stressed investing before disasters—weather monitoring, communications in redundancy, hardened power/fuel systems, shelters, and planning—rather than repeatedly rebuilding in high-risk locations.
- Human impacts persist
 - Long-term behavioral health needs, cultural disruption, and subsistence losses continue well after evacuations; delayed case management and counseling funds left gaps in support.
- Denali Commission and BIA roles
 - Many supported strengthening the Denali Commission as a coordinating entity for Alaska-specific resilience and relocation, alongside expanded BIA Tribal resilience funding and a dedicated tribal emergency management grant.