

Setting the record straight for Alaskans

April 28, 2014

By Governor Sean Parnell

In response to a recent opinion piece (Sunday, April 27) regarding the Alaska National Guard that was full of false statements and inferences designed to mislead readers, I am compelled to set the record straight.

First and foremost, the author's claim that I did nothing when first hearing the concerns from National Guard chaplains about sexual assault complaints is utterly false.

Since my days in the state Legislature to my time as governor, my top priority has been to eliminate sexual assault and domestic violence in Alaska, including the military.

The chaplains provided general information to me that sexual assaults were occurring in the Guard, but because of their duty of confidentiality to the people they counsel, the chaplains could not disclose names of victims, perpetrators, or specific circumstances.

Nevertheless, even without specific enough details to pinpoint a victim or case, I went to Adjutant General Tom Katkus, requesting information regarding what the chaplains had told me. I made sure through Gen. Katkus that Guard members have a safe route to report sexual misconduct, and that their allegations are taken seriously and investigated to conclusion, including appropriate penalties.

Where criminal conduct was alleged, we directed referrals to the appropriate law enforcement agency, such as the Anchorage Police Department.

Further, the opinion piece asserts that Sen. Fred Dyson came to me a number of times with concerns about what he heard from the same chaplains. During Sen. Dyson's visit with me last fall, he too had only general allegations. On Feb. 26, 2014, Sen. Dyson gave me the name of a Guard member who was willing to provide specific detail.

Within 24 hours of that meeting, I personally phoned the person named by Sen. Dyson. In that call, I learned of specific, but unverified allegations, causing me to question the existing reporting and investigation process.

Two days later, within a day of getting specific details about the reporting system – not two weeks, as the columnist claims – I sent my request to General Grass, chief of the National Guard Bureau, for a review of all open and closed investigations related to reports of sexual assault, rape, and fraud among Alaska National Guard members.

The National Guard Bureau responded quickly, and currently has a team in Alaska conducting the review.

The columnist's claim that our administration had enough specifics to act on before 2014 is based on two instances: First, the writer alleges that Katie TePas of my office

had witness statements. As I understand it, Ms. TePas was visited on separate occasions by two members of the Guard who provided the same general allegations related to sexual misconduct, and those allegations were broad and lacked specifics. On another occasion, a third Guard member came to see Ms. TePas and said she had been the victim of a sexual assault. This person let Ms. TePas know the case had been referred to the Anchorage Police Department.

The columnist refers to a letter from Sen. Mark Begich's aide, Bob Doehl, a former member of the Alaska National Guard, as someone who "named names." However, Mr. Doehl's letter was not about sexual misconduct in the Guard, but about his concerns related to overtaxing of Guard members and assets, his own failure to be promoted, and alleged illegal activity.

I dug into those concerns with Gen. Katkus and learned about inspector general investigations and reviews conducted years before Mr. Doehl's letter. The only other communication I have from Mr. Doehl is a request that I hire him for the adjutant general's job.

No one should be subjected to sexual assault or have to work in a hostile work environment. I have always acted swiftly and aggressively to protect Alaskans, whether Guard member or non-Guard Alaskans. I have and will continue to take these issues very seriously.

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