

November 18, 2009

Statement from Sen. Mark Begich on release of Wheeler report:

“It comes as no surprise that the report issued by Municipal Attorney Dennis Wheeler is critical of me and my administration. We should not pretend that this review of the facts was objective, fair or complete. The Sullivan Administration, in concert with a handful of Assembly members, is determined to tarnish the record of my administration and this is just the latest step in that effort.

“I cooperated with the Municipal Attorney, provided documents showing information the Assembly had about the state of city finances in 2008 and throughout my tenure as mayor, and supplied facts and information to put those documents in context. I sent Mr. Wheeler several letters inviting him to submit any additional questions he had, but it wasn’t until Nov. 12 – after receiving my fourth such letter and three days before he released his report – that any questions were submitted. I promptly answered those questions (see attachment).

“As I have said since day one, the Anchorage Assembly was fully apprised of all financial information related to the Municipality throughout my terms as mayor. The suggestion that the Assembly was not fully informed about the Municipality’s financial condition is absurd and totally at odds with the record. We held multiple work sessions, issued reports and memos, and fully answered all questions. I could not, however, hold their collective hand to make sure they retained and analyzed the information provided. I think what we’ve seen is the result of an Assembly that eliminated its own budget analyst office and then was unable to keep up with the job they were elected to do. It’s regrettable that some have tried to gain political advantage calling into question labor contracts that were vigorously negotiated and contained terms that were fair, both to the Municipality and to the police officers and fire fighters who put their lives on the line for us every day.

“When I was elected mayor in 2003 and inherited a \$33 million budget gap, I didn’t complain about the previous administration. We got to work, closed the gap and pulled the city together. I would urge the Sullivan Administration and the Anchorage Assembly to stop trying to divide the community, deal with the budget challenges they face, and put the citizens of Anchorage above political games.

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