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September 2, 2008

GOVERNOR PALIN CALLS FOR FORMAL REVIEW OF REPLACEMENT OF COMMISSIONER MONEGAN

In 2005 and early 2006, State Trooper Mike Wooten was the subject of a court-imposed Domestic Violence Protective Order and, as I learned in 2008, an order suspending him from the Alaska State Troopers for violent behavior. Some of this violent behavior was directed against my family (including my sister, who was divorced from Trooper Wooten in 2006), and included threats against my father. Over the past several weeks, there has been a suggestion that these events are somehow connected to my decision in 2008 to replace Public Safety Commissioner Walt Monegan, whom I appointed to the position after becoming Governor and after the events involving Trooper Wooten had occurred. There is no such connection. To put these matters to rest, on Monday, September 1, 2008, I formally asked the Alaska Personnel Board to investigate the allegations that have been made in the media about my replacement of Walt Monegan.

Concerns about Trooper Wooten's behavior were aired both by members of my family and others before Mr. Monegan ever took office as Public Safety Commissioner. There is absolutely nothing improper about voicing concerns about Trooper Wooten -- including threats to "bring" the governor and family members "down" -- with Mr. Monegan or his predecessor—complaints about State Troopers are supposed to go to the Commissioner.^[1] Nor is there anything wrong with Mr. Monegan or his predecessor receiving information about threats specifically directed at me or my family. Threats of violence against a public official, and his or her family, fall within the responsibilities of the Department of Public Safety. In any event, the details about Trooper Wooten's behavior are outlined in my filing, and I will not repeat them here. Suffice it to say that both the Anchorage Superior Court and the Department of Public Safety issued orders and findings concluding that he had engaged in serious, violent misconduct.

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Neither my decision to appoint Walt Monegan as Public Safety Commissioner in 2006 nor my decision to replace him in 2008 had anything to do with Trooper Wooten. Mr. Monegan has publicly stated that "no one ever said fire Wooten. Not the governor. Not Todd. Not any of the other staff." The fact of the matter is that, while I was impressed with Mr. Monegan's abilities in many respects, he and I had differences of opinion on budget matters that have been a priority of my administration since the beginning, and I therefore decided to appoint a replacement commissioner and asked Mr. Monegan to take another leadership position in the government that was better suited to his skills and less prone to friction over budget matters. As Governor, I have the authority to hire and fire Public Safety Commissioners and other cabinet members and agency heads for any reason.^[2] Mr. Monegan himself recognized as much in a letter he wrote at the time of his departure.

Last night, I initiated a proceeding before the state personnel board because that is the agency charged by law with addressing complaints about hiring and firing matters, and ethical issues in general, involving the Governor.^[3] It is important to note that no one has actually filed a complaint against me, including Mr. Monegan, who would have had an obligation to notify the Personnel Board if he believed there had been misconduct in connection with his replacement.^[4] Nonetheless, the people of Alaska—and of the nation—deserve to have a decision from the proper tribunal putting their minds at ease that suggestions of misconduct that have circulated on the Internet and in some media outlets are not true. I therefore am waiving the confidentiality that usually covers personnel board complaints,^[5] and look forward to the personnel board's investigation and to moving forward with the people's business.

[1] See Department of Law, FAQ: "I want to complain about . . . a state trooper. Who can help me? Complaints against a state trooper must be filed in writing with the Juneau Office of the Commissioner." www.law.state.ak.us./department/faq.

[2] Under our State Constitution, Article III, Sec. 25, the "head of each principal department shall be a single executive . . . appointed by the governor, subject to confirmation by a majority of the members of the legislature in joint session, **and shall serve at the pleasure of the governor . . .**" State statutory law is the same: "Each principal executive officer serves at the pleasure of the governor." AS [39.05.030](#).

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[3] AS 39.52.310(c) ("If a complaint alleges a violation of AS 39.52.110--39.52.190 by the governor, lieutenant governor, or the attorney general, the matter **shall** be referred to the personnel board."

[4] AS 39.52.210(a) ("A public employee who is involved in a matter that may result in a violation of AS 39.52.110--39.52.190 shall (1) refrain from taking any official action relating to the matter until a determination is made under this section; and (2) **immediately disclose the matter in writing** to the designated supervisor and the attorney general").

[5] AS 39.52.340(c).