

Senate State Affairs Committee  
Senator Mike Shower, Chair  
Capitol Room 510  
Juneau, AK 99801  
Email to: [jake.almeida@akleg.gov](mailto:jake.almeida@akleg.gov)

Dear Senator Shower:

I am writing today to urge the Alaska Senate to confirm Gov. Dunleavy's appointment of Kelly Tshibaka as Commissioner of Administration. I have known Kelly since we were classmates at Harvard Law School back in 2000. Over the last 19 years Kelly has been my classmate, my pastor, and my friend. I have come alongside her as she planted churches in Boston and in the Washington, D.C. area that ultimately became viable and successful. She also has the ability to work across the aisle. I should know...I am a card carrying Democrat and lifelong liberal who works as counsel at the Service Employees International Union ("SEIU"), a union united by the belief in the dignity and worth of workers and the services they provide and is dedicated to improving the lives of workers and their families and creating a more just and humane society.<sup>1</sup> To be clear, I am NOT writing on my employer's behalf, but rather on my own behalf as someone who has partnered alongside her for almost 20 years. Based on that experience, I have no doubt that she has the integrity, grit, grace, and skills to be an effective Commissioner of Administrator for the State of Alaska.

It should be clear that Kelly and I do not share similar political beliefs. In fact, on most political issues, Kelly and I tend to be very far apart. However, the fact that I have collaborated with Kelly consistently for the better part of the last nineteen years should speak volumes about her ability to work with the State of Alaska's varied constituencies, including progressive groups and labor. A major reason I moved to Washington, D.C. involved my desire to come alongside Kelly and her husband as they worked to plant their church. Over the years I saw how she handled thorny issue after thorny issue at our fledgling church with a very diverse constituency with a deft hand. She was able to broker a balance between factions in our church who deeply cared about social justice issues and those who did not share that same fervor. Typically, those types of factions cause churches to split, but she was able to hold it together.

Kelly and I have been able to have open and frank conversations about a number of difficult political issues including gun control, the minimum wage, labor rights, the role of media, and the relationship between church and state. I specifically remember how we spoke about gun control, and she told me about how as a teen in Alaska she had to handle a gun in order to hunt. I told her stories about being shot as a teenager in inner-city Chicago, and how it led me to support further gun control. While Kelly and I have not fundamentally changed our positions, our interactions have allowed us to grow in our mutual respect for one another, and more importantly, a better understanding of each other's positions and fruitful conversations about what a reasonable compromise looks like.

That skill is crucial for navigating the difficult conversations she will have to have with disparate and conflicting stakeholders, including bargaining with the state's labor unions. I firmly believe that Kelly is a

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<sup>1</sup> I am writing this letter solely in my personal capacity. Nothing in this letter should be seen as a statement or endorsement of the SEIU in any way, shape, or form.

person who "accepts the premise" that collective bargaining is a legitimate way to resolve disputes and achieve compromise on tough issues. My nearly 20 years of experience engaging with her as a classmate, parishioner, friend, and political sparring partner have confirmed that bias.

I also have no doubt that the people of Alaska can trust her with their tax dollars, as I have with my own money. When we were in law school, Kelly fundraised for an acting group in a lower income area of Boston. When I asked her why she was willing to run a long race for that purpose, she told me it was because she wanted the kids in Dorchester to have the resources to succeed. She asked me to donate, and I ended up donating a large amount for a student from the inner city because I believed in her ability to run the raise, and get that money to where it needed to go. True to form, that is exactly what happened! Even though Kelly and I disagree about the role of the government in people's lives, we could come together and agree to get money raised for a cause that was near and dear to both our hearts.

I should note that I do not regularly write these types of letters, especially in today's hyper-partisan environment. However, I felt compelled in this instance to do so because the people of Alaska are getting a hyper talented, thoughtful, and effective protector of their tax dollars. I have seen Kelly make tough decisions, but I know she will do so an open enough mind to look for effective solutions and meaningful compromise. It is for that reason that I urge the Senate to confirm Kelly Tshibaka.

Thank you for your time and attention to this letter.

Sincerely,



Alvin Velazquez