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**Walker-Drygas ticket calls on Governor Dunleavy to competently respond
to health care crisis**

“Dunleavy has failed Alaskans and the healthcare community”

Anchorage, Alaska – Today candidates for governor and lieutenant governor, Bill Walker and Heidi Drygas, issued the following statement:

Leadership means taking strong positions in Alaskans’ best interests, even in tough times. Alaska certainly is in tough times today. Doing nothing about the fiscal crisis as we run out of savings is one thing but doing literally nothing to promote vaccinations during a pandemic, and the rise of the Delta Variant, is an utter failure to lead.

As our hospitals fill up to overflowing, the vast majority of those hospitalized are unvaccinated Alaskans. It is true Alaska’s Department of Health and Social Services did a commendable job of initially getting Covid vaccines distributed and administered around the state. Commissioner Adam Crum, Dr. Anne Zink, and their entire team deserve credit. Additionally, it is clear that Alaska’s strong tribal health system led our state to early success and a lead on vaccination rates earlier this year.

Since then, Governor Dunleavy has dissolved the disaster declaration provided to him by the Legislature, which would have allowed him to better prepare Alaska for the rise of the Delta Variant. We have also watched in dismay as Alaska’s vaccination rate plummeted from first in the nation down the bottom quarter of states.

Other states are taking innovative approaches such as monetary incentives or lotteries to encourage vaccinations, and their vaccination rates have climbed. We see other governors—even Republican governors—standing before the microphone and unequivocally urging their residents to vaccinate. We see other states working with unions to find ways to encourage public employees to vaccinate. In the meantime, Governor Dunleavy seems to lack the ability even to make a clear public statement on the importance of vaccination. Shockingly, at the height of this

crisis, he actually issued a press release about the pandemic that didn't even include the word "vaccine."

A governor cannot run from hard decisions, but that is what Dunleavy seems determined to do. For the sake of appeasing his political base, he continues to minimize the critical role that vaccination could play in protecting Alaskans and our economy. But a governor doesn't just represent his base. He or she must represent all Alaskans, including the immunocompromised and the approximately 120,000 Alaskans under the age of 12 who are ineligible to receive the vaccine. We have watched as Republican governor Larry Hogan of Maryland said loudly into the microphone, "Just get the damn vaccine!" That is leadership.

Together, we have listened to input from medical professionals and health care leaders from around the state. Their input has been unanimous—they are asking for help, and leadership, before it is too late. We thank them for their service and, in response, we call on Governor Dunleavy to take the following reasonable and measured steps in response to this growing crisis:

1. Make a clear and public declaration encouraging vaccination. It can be as simple as: "I have consulted with my Administration's medical experts and they tell me the science is clear—the vaccines are safe and effective. I strongly urge you to protect yourself and your fellow Alaskans by getting vaccinated."
2. Issue a new Disaster Declaration in response to the requests from the medical community. This will allow you to streamline procurement, hiring, and other requirements in order to help our teetering health care system
3. Propose financial incentives (lotteries or direct payments) to encourage more Alaskans to get vaccinated.
4. Meet with state employee union representatives to discuss a plan to have more state employees vaccinated with accommodations for those who refuse or cannot get vaccinated.
5. Change your tone and step up to the same level of urgency that we have seen from Dr. Zink and her very capable team.

In short, minimizing the risks of Covid and the benefit of the vaccine is not leadership. Demeaning mask wearing as "virtue signaling" is not leadership. It's time for Governor Dunleavy to stop playing partisan games with the health of Alaskans and our economy, and to follow the advice and urgent tone of his own health care team.

Finally, we acknowledge that we owe a debt of gratitude to all of those in the medical community, and those who support them, for the amazing work they have done to protect Alaskans. Likewise, we owe the same debt to those in the service industry and education who have kept our businesses and schools running. Now is the time for all of us to repay that debt by doing everything we can to mitigate and end this pandemic.

As Governor Dunleavy knows, but appears afraid to clearly say, the single best tool to fight Covid is to get vaccinated. Please join us in encouraging all Alaskans to do so as soon as possible."

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