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Parnell certifies Murkowski as Alaska's U.S. Senator

By Klas Stolpe | JUNEAU EMPIRE

S-E-A-N, P-A-R-N-E-L-L. The intent was clear Thursday morning on the third floor of the State Capital Building as Gov. Sean Parnell signed U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski's certification papers declaring her the winner of the 2010 Alaska Senatorial Race nearly two months after the election.

"I think it is important that the rule of law was upheld," Parnell said. "And that the voters intent was upheld. The voters have spoken and the courts have confirmed their voice. We have now certified and attested to Senator Murkowski's election."

With Lieutenant Governor Mead Treadwell and Director of Elections Gail Fenumiai looking on in the Governor's Office, Parnell began signing at 11:02 a.m. smoothly, clearly, and precisely on the line of the State of Alaska Official Election Certification.

Parnell read from the certificate, "This certifies that on the second day of November, 2010 Lisa Murkowski was duly chosen by the qualified members of the State of Alaska as Senator from said state to represent Alaska in the Senate of the United States for the term of six years beginning the third of January 2011."

After signing, Parnell said, "Happy Holidays" and stated he would be happy to work with legislators on clarifying voter intent legislation in the coming session.

At precisely 11:03 a.m., Treadwell signed with the same care and intent, after which he and Parnell thanked Fenumiai and her staff at the Division of Elections and the Department of Law for their work during the election process and through the holiday season.

"Her work has now been reviewed by two state courts including the Supreme Court and the federal court," Treadwell said. "And they have given her work in executing the law a clean bill of health and I commend her for that."

Fenumiai was scheduled to hand-deliver the certification document to the U.S. Senate Secretary's Office in Washington D.C., leaving Juneau Thursday night. Parnell made arrangements for the second certificate to get to Washington by "other means."

"There have been a few upset-stomach moments," Fenumiai answered when asked if she was happy the process was now complete. "It is all part of the process. We felt really confident in all we did along the way. We felt the whole election process was handled honestly, professionally, and unbiased."

A press release from the Murkowski campaign stated it felt great to be officially declared the winner.

"We spent six weeks running a campaign," said Murkowski campaign manager Kevin Sweeney. "And it took eight weeks to get the final result."

Sweeney also said that the long wait may have been anti-climatic but it did not diminish the historic accomplishment of the campaign, and that Alaskans who contributed should be proud today. "All Alaskans regardless of how they voted, can be assured that Senator Murkowski will continue to work in Alaska's best interest for the next six years."

Murkowski was defeated by Joe Miller in the Aug. 24 GOP primary. Encouraged by what Murkowski described as "overwhelming Alaskan support" she waged a write-in candidacy for the Nov. 2 primary race.

She won by more than 10,000 votes. The Miller campaign disputed many of the write-in votes, but even then Murkowski still held upwards of a 2,000-ballot lead.

Miller sued, a move that resulted in certification being postponed by a judge. The judge on Tuesday cleared the way for certification, which came 58 days after the election. Murkowski's write-in campaign lasted just 46 days.

On Dec. 10 Alaska Superior Court state judge William Carey ruled against Miller's challenge of write-in votes and found no proof for Miller's claims of election fraud; on Dec. 22 the Alaska Supreme Court unanimously upheld the lower court; and on Dec. 29 federal judge Ralph Beistline ruled against Miller in Anchorage U.S. District Court, upholding the Supreme Court ruling but offering Miller the advice that the state has a poorly drafted state statute. Beistline said, "For now we have to work with what we have and that is what the Alaska Supreme Court has done."

Murkowski is the first Senatorial write-in candidate winner since Strom Thurmond won South Carolina in 1954. Murkowski will be sworn in for her second full term in the U.S. Senate in a ceremony on the Senate floor Jan. 5.

Miller is expected to make a statement this afternoon as to his next course of action.

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