



Denali Borough Mayoral Candidate Forum Report, 2011

*Incumbent **Dave Talerico** has served as Borough Mayor for nine years. He pointed out that part of what makes the Denali Borough a special community, is not necessarily because of the government, but because of the large amount of services (such as the Lions Club, Volunteer Fire Departments, etc.) available that help keep our government small. He identified some of the projects that he has been deeply involved with, and would like to continue work on, such as the junked car collection program, and projects at local schools.*

*Assembly member, and 2011 Mayoral candidate, **John Winklmann**, has served on the Borough Assembly for four years, and has been involved in Borough government for the last ten years. He stated that education was a high priority for him, pointing out that the School District's budget is larger than any other Borough service. He pointed out that education, along with managing the land fill, are two important (and required) services, and added that land management and bed tax collection were also very important.*

Candidates were asked **how they see themselves implementing change**. Talerico pointed out that residents likely would not see any major changes in management styles, as he has been serving in this position for several years already. He did acknowledge that some changes were needed, and stated that one of the more pressing changes that the Borough needs is management of hunting in Unit 20A. He described the issues faced currently in the Borough within this particular unit, especially related to the antlerless hunt, safety issues with the Alaska Railroad, and impacts around the Ferry Trail. Winklmann explained that it's important to understand the executive, and administrative roles of a Mayor within a home-ruled Borough. He also pointed out that direction for Mayoral duties comes from Borough Charter and Code, and that he is interested in promoting positive change within that system.

One question asked candidates whether the **bed tax and severance tax would provide adequate funding** in the future. Talerico thought that it would (in the absence of a major emergency) as long as the Borough is not careless with their projects, pointing out a need to be careful and maintain a carry-over. Winklmann agreed that these funding sources would be adequate in the short-term, and added that we diversify our local economy to avoid putting "all of our eggs in one basket." Both candidates acknowledged that any major emergency would be a hard blow to the local budget.

Neither candidate seemed thrilled with developing **formalized city government in Healy**. Winklmann pointed out that there was an opportunity to do this when the Borough was formed, but that it wasn't pursued. He stated that if local residents wanted this, he would follow the will of the people so long as the option was safe, economically feasible, and not bothersome to the rest of the of the Borough's population. Talerico agreed that he would support something sought by residents, but that he would not personally vote for it. He also pointed out that it would be difficult to draw city limits, and that it is sometimes difficult to support the levels of government we have now.

Candidates were asked whether the Borough should provide **additional services**, including road powers, emergency services and public safety, and recreation. Neither candidate was supportive of taking on additional services at this time based on population numbers. Talerico pointed out that taking on road powers would add a great economic burden on the Borough. He pointed out that the Borough already funds emergency services. He acknowledged that in the future it's likely that the Borough will need to take these services over, and that (for now) the system works as is, but that



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it would be difficult to provide for public safety. He said that he would support taking on more Recreational services, and indicated that he would like to see some particular Borough lands used to create a park gateway. Winklmann maintained that any new services would not be economically feasible without implementing taxes or finding other revenue streams to support it, and for this reason he could not support it.

Another question asked if the mayoral candidates would support efforts to **gain control of Alaska Railroad lands for economic development or private land ownership**. Both candidates acknowledged that the Tri-Valley subdivision is a good example of land that could move from Alaska Railroad ownership into private hands. Winklmann pointed out that this parcel of land is not connected to the railroad, and Talerico added that the goal should be private land ownership, rather than any form of Borough control or management.

Should the borough **promote agricultural development**? Both Winklmann and Talerico pointed out the local potential for agricultural use. Winklmann explained that the Borough Planning Commission is working on agricultural classifications for Borough-owned lands. He said that the Borough was recently approached about agricultural use of lands, and said they would likely move forward on this. Talerico added that the state has identified agricultural (state-owned) lands in the northern region of the Borough, particularly around Kobe. He added that the Borough could help move local agriculture along by getting the state more interested in pursuing opportunities in the Interior.

Both mayoral candidates are strong supporters of a **pedestrian trail running through the Denali Borough**, parallel to the Parks Highway. Talerico suggested that the Borough could perhaps move forward by seeking a Right-of-Way from the state. Winklmann also supports trails along other roads in the Borough, citing a need for safety, especially for transportation to and from local schools. He pointed out the need to connect these trails, and allow for a variety of uses.

When asked about **local air quality**, candidates both acknowledged that at times there are times when air quality is poor, but that air quality was not a major issue. Winklmann acknowledged he has noticed a haze over Healy before when driving into town, and said that it was something we should pay attention to, even if it's not a major problem at this time. Talerico pointed out that local education about cleaner options could address air quality, if citizens are concerned.

To wrap up the evening, candidates were asked how the Borough should use the **Municipal Land Entitlements** recently received from the state. Talerico stressed the need to get the property into private ownership. He pointed out that land in private hands would benefit both businesses and individuals, and suggested variations in settlement areas, including different lot sizes, to allow young people a more economical option. Winklmann agreed that a good portion of the lands should be put into private hands, and added that leasing property, and investing in it were both good options as well.