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Alaska governor says abortion decision not political

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FILE - In this Monday, March 2, 2020, file photo, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Commissioner Adam Crum addresses the state's coronavirus preparedness at a news conference in Anchorage, Alaska. The state of Alaska has placed surgical abortions on a list of procedures that could be postponed to help conserve personal protective equipment for health care workers amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

chief medical officer in guidance that lists surgical abortions on a list of procedures that could be delayed to conserve medical resources amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

State Sens. Tom Begich and Jesse Kiehl called the inclusion of surgical abortions political, and Begich, the Senate minority leader from Anchorage, said it undermines the credibility of Dr. Anne Zink, who has won praise for her approach in communicating with Alaskans about the coronavirus. Begich asked that the provision be retracted.

Zink told reporters Wednesday the health and well-being of all Alaskans is her focus.

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“And honestly, that’s a really hard job in a setting of a world pandemic with a lack of supplies. And I really try to stay out of the political aspect of it and stay 100% focused on the health aspect of it,” she said.

She said she, with a team, works to try to figure out the best recommendations. “The decisions right now are broad, and they’re hard,” she said.

On Tuesday, the state issued an update to a mandate released last month that required non-urgent or elective procedures be canceled or postponed for three

expand available hospital capacity in the midst of dealing with COVID-19.

The update was accompanied by a list of surgeries or procedures that would be considered non-urgent or elective. Under a section for gynecological procedures that “could be delayed for a few weeks,” it lists surgical abortion.

It says healthcare providers “are to postpone surgical abortion procedures unless the life or physical health of the mother is endangered by continuation of the pregnancy during the period of postponement.” The language leaves room for “professional judgment” on the timeframe, state health Commissioner Adam Crum said Tuesday.

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University for handling gynecological surgeries during the COVID-19 pandemic. It lists pregnancy termination under a list of surgeries that “if significantly delayed could cause significant harm.”

The state’s list included a link to that guidance.

Gov. Mike Dunleavy denied politics were involved.

“We’re all in this together, we all need to contribute, we all need to do our best right now to move elective surgeries off to the future,” he said. The state is trying to collect as much personal protective equipment as possible, he said, “and I think most Alaskans agree with that.”

The Senate minority on Wednesday released separate emails from Begich and Kiehl to Zink, whose name is on the mandate and list along with Dunleavy and Crum.

Kiehl, a Juneau Democrat, said seeing Zink’s name “atop this piece of pure politics is unconscionable.”

Jim Minnery, president of the conservative Alaska Family Action, in a missive late Tuesday urged Alaskans to sign an online petition thanking Dunleavy.

states have prompted lawsuits, with mixed results so far.

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