2010 Convention

"Village Survival"

Senator Mark Begich speaks with Yup'ik Elder Paul John.

News from United States Senator Mark Begich

MARK BEGICH
ALASKA

UNITED STATES SENATE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20510

Dear Fellow Alaskan:

Welcome to the 2010 Alaska Federation of Natives Convention.

It is an honor to join you for this important occasion, as I had done each year as Mayor of Anchorage and now as your United States Senator. I always look forward to the AFN convention, to share with you important developments in Washington, D.C., to hear your priorities for the upcoming year and to join in the celebration of your rich heritage.

From dancing with you at Quyana Night to seeing new and old friends at the arts and crafts fair, I am grateful for your warm welcome and shared insights every year.

Consider this newsletter a brief update on the many issues impacting rural and Alaska Native communities. Please continue to tell me your concerns and suggestions as I work hard to represent you in the Senate.

Quyana. Háw'aa. Doykshin. Quyanaq. Gunalchéesh. Ana Baasee'. Qagaaskung. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mark Begich

Senator Mark Begich

News to Use

How to contact Senator Begich

Senator Begich wants to hear from you – he receives an average of 1,000 communications from Alaskans weekly. See the back page for contact information for the Senator's offices; call his Anchorage office toll free, (877) 501-6275; or visit his website, http://begich.senate.gov.

What Senator Begich's office can do for You

Senator Begich can help Alaskans cut through red tape with federal departments and agencies. His staff is pleased to answer your questions about federal programs and work with you to resolve problems. Call Senator Begich's office toll free, (877) 501-6275.

Internships with Senator Begich

Senator Begich's office is accepting applications for high school and college internships throughout the year. Positions are available in Washington, Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau. Instructions on how to apply and eligibility requirements are available on his website.

Constituent Coffees with Senator Begich

Nearly every week during the spring and fall in Washington, D.C., Senator Begich hosts constituent coffees for Alaskans, usually Thursdays at 8:30-9:30 a.m. They are a great opportunity to talk to Senator Begich, his staff and get a photo with the Senator.

Keeping Rural Alaska Strong and Healthy

Indian Health Care Law Reauthorized After Nearly 20 Years

No reform of America's health care system would be complete without addressing the health needs of the nation's First Peoples.

Last winter, I championed the long-overdue reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, including it in the final health reform bill. I was proud to be the only member of our congressional delegation to vote for the bill's final passage, allowing it to become law on March 23, 2010.

Originally enacted in 1976, the Indian Health Care Improvement Act provides the legal authority for federally funded health care to the nation's residents. The bill had not been reauthorized in nearly two decades. Inaction by Congress justifiably frustrated many Alaska Natives and American Indians around the country.

Reauthorization means the Indian Health Service is empowered and better equipped to address the health disparities of American Indians and Alaska Natives, which includes better long-term care for elders, comprehensive mental health services, and updated preventive screening. For more information about the reauthorization, contact my office. ■

Senator Begich visits families in Toksook Bay in August.

High-Speed Internet On the Way

Extending high-speed, broadband Internet to all Alaskans, regardless of where they live, is essential for education, job training, health care, economic opportunities and basic information access.

Earlier this year, United Utilities, Inc., was awarded $88 million through the Recovery Act to provide broadband services to 65 communities in Southwest Alaska. Additional broadband awards for our state include $25 million for 4G high-speed broadband Internet service, reaching 29,000 rural residents in 53 Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta villages; $6.4 million to connect Alaska for broadband mapping and planning; and $3.4 million to improve and extend wireless broadband services in the Cordova area.

I recently hosted Federal Communications Commissioner Mignon Clyburn in our state. ■

Needs of Rural Vets Addressed

With more veterans per capita than any state, ensuring Alaska's veterans have access to the care and benefits they were promised is a top priority of mine.

In February, I held two Commerce Committee field hearings – one in Anchorage and one in Fairbanks – focused on improving services for Alaska veterans. In August, I held two listening sessions in Nome to hear from veterans about challenges in accessing health care and other benefits. The Veterans Administration (VA) has committed to finding better ways to serve our rural veterans.

Just last month, I met with VA Secretary Eric Shinseki to emphasize my support for better health coverage for vets who may have been affected by Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. Secretary Shinseki committed to coming to Alaska next year. ■

Jobs, Facility Improvements Go to Rural Alaska

Since day one in the Senate, my priorities are ensuring rural Alaska has access to basic community infrastructure, such as quality housing, water and sewer, and broadband connections; creating jobs for Alaskans; and helping our country recover from one of the worst economic crises in history.

That's why I was proud to stand up for Alaskans to support the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. This vital measure is improving infrastructure and providing jobs in remote areas with the highest per capita funding of any state, about $1.6 billion.

Nome's new Norton Sound Regional Hospital under construction.

One of the largest projects is Nome's Norton Sound Regional Hospital. This $152 million hospital will replace the 61-year-old facility with a new, three-story building, three times the size, and bring 170 jobs to the region.

Another Recovery project is Kotzebue Shore Avenue, a $38 million reconstruction of 4,400 feet of the road, including sidewalks, parallel parking, street lights and erosion protection.

Additionally, Alaska is receiving $88 million in grants and loans for "middle mile" broadband service (see "Broadband Development").

For a more complete listing of other Recovery projects, please visit my website: http://begich.senate.gov. ■

Protecting Alaska Native Cultures and Traditions

Local veterans from Bering Sea VFW Post 9569 in Nome meet with Senator Begich this summer.

Subsistence Vital for Rural Alaskans

Last October, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced a sweeping review of subsistence management in Alaska. His office held meetings throughout Alaska with subsistence stakeholders and outlined proposed changes to fix the broken management system.

Although a step in the right direction, it is not enough. Subsistence management is a complex issue, but the Alaska Native community has been able to sustain this way of life for 10,000 years. I am committed to ensuring the federal government protects this cherished way of life for Alaska Native people.

I was pleased to help secure $5 million to help compensate Yukon fishing families affected by the 2008-09 salmon disaster. Eligible fishermen have until January 2011 to apply for the funding and I strongly encourage you to do so. Application information is available on my website.

For more information about my efforts to protect subsistence, contact my office. ■

Senator Wants More Public Safety

Prompted by deep concerns from rural leaders, I am working to increase the public safety presence in rural communities on several fronts.

I was proud to co-sponsor the Tribal Law and Order Act, signed into law by President Obama in late July. It allows tribal non-profits in Alaska that employ Village Public Safety Officers to apply for federal grants and train at the Indian Policy Academy in New Mexico.

I also introduced the Alaska Safe Families and Villages Act of 2010, designed to help address high rates of suicide, sexual assault and alcohol and drug abuse. Participating tribes would have the ability to enforce sanctions, such as community service, on tribal members, issue protective orders and establish the Alaska Village Peace Officer grants program. If enacted, I believe this law will allow eligible tribes to be truly self-determined, making the most appropriate, culturally relevant decisions when dealing with serious social infractions. ■

Begich Proposes Education Reforms

The current one-size-fits-all federal education law is a poor fit for Alaska. That's why I have called for an overhaul of No Child Left Behind and support changes that recognize Alaska's unique geography, weather and cultures.

I believe there should be more local control. Funding rules must ensure even the smallest school districts have adequate resources. Struggling rural schools need flexibility to implement improvement measures that work best in each community. We also need a strong and substantial commitment to early learning, so students begin school better prepared and ready to learn.

I recently introduced bills to expand innovative programs to improve student scores and graduation, and to strengthen the teaching of science, technology, engineering and math.

You can read more about my views on education at http://begich.senate.gov/education ■

8(a) Program Vital for Alaska Natives

The 8(a) contracting provision allowing Alaska Native corporations and tribes access to federal services provides hundreds of good jobs for Alaskans and brings millions of dollars in benefits to our state. That's why I have been a strong supporter.

In June, I welcomed federal Small Business Administrator Karen Mills to Anchorage for the SBA 8(a) national conference. It helped her learn more about how the unwarranted attacks in Congress will impact this valuable program.

I was able to guarantee all tribal participants in the SBA's Native American 8(a) program will be consulted regarding any new rules affecting Alaska Native 8(a) and Native American defense contracting changes. ■

What other events will be happening in Fairbanks during Convention week?

- "The Winter Bear" will be performed at the Pioneer Park Centennial Center, October 18. "The Winter Bear" is an adapted play inspired by the life and times of Athabascan elder Sidney Huntington.
- The AFN Elders and Youth Conference will be held at the Carlson Center October 18 and 19, 8 AM to 5 PM. Everyone welcome!
- The AFN Men and Women's Basketball Tournament will be held at North Pole Middle School and begins October 21.
- An Athabascan Fiddle Dance will be held at the Chena Convention Center, 111 Clay St. Downtown Fairbanks on October 21 starting at 7 PM.
- The AFN Alaska Native Arts and Crafts Fair will be held October 21 to the 23 at the Carlson Center during the Convention.
- The Fairbanks Resource Agency 6th Annual City Sampler will be held October 21 at the Westmark Hotel starting at 6:30 PM. Sample Fairbanks finest restaurant cuisine, with door prizes. Tickets available at Gulliver's Books, Hallmark POM, and Fairbanks Resource Agency.
- AFN Quyana Nights will be held at the Carlson Center October 21, 22, and 23, starting at 7 PM.

Senator Begich meets with inspiring members of the Native Emerging Leaders Forum in Anchorage earlier this year.

2010 ANNUAL AFN CONVENTION SCHEDULE :: OCTOBER 21-23, 2010

THURSDAY, Oct 21

8:00 am – 5:00 pm
Annual Convention

7:30 am – 11:00 & 1:00 – 5:00 pm
Delegate Registration

8:00 am – 7:00 pm
Native Arts & Crafts Show

7:00 pm – 11:00 pm
Quyana Alaska I

FRIDAY, Oct 22

8:00 am – 5:00 pm
Annual Convention

8:00 am – 7:00 pm
Native Arts & Crafts Show

7:00 pm – 11:00 pm
Quyana Alaska II

SATURDAY, Oct 23

8:00 am – 3:00 pm
Annual Convention

8:00 am – 4:00 pm
Native Arts & Crafts Show

6:00 pm
AFN Banquet Reception

7:00 pm
AFN Banquet Dinner

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