



E-NEWSLETTER

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Working Weekends

The health reform debate has us on the clock seven days a week right now as we work to find the best solutions to bring quality, affordable health care to Alaskans and all Americans. We worked this past weekend, and it looks like we'll stay in session through the upcoming weekend. Clearly this is an important issue, and I'm pleased to see Congress giving it so much time and attention to get it right.

Today, I participated in a news conference with Sen. Debbie

Stabenow and Sen. Jeff Merkley, along with the President of the Consumers Union. We were joined by a woman from Pennsylvania who lost her brother after he was denied health care coverage. We spoke about the need to end insurance industry abuses that have denied coverage to hard working Americans when they need it most. Tuesday, I will join a group of freshmen Democratic senators in announcing our package of amendments focused on cost containment.

I also remain focused on the war in Afghanistan and supporting the President's decision to send more troops. With 4,000 Alaska-based troops in the region, our state has a lot at stake. We have to eliminate the threat of al-Quaida, and the President has laid out a comprehensive plan that calls on the contributions of other nations while restoring the confidence of the Afghan people in their government. As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I'll do everything within my power to make sure they have the resources, equipment and right strategy they need to get the job done.

Sincerely,



Senator Mark Begich

Sharing Alaska's Health Reform Stories



On December 7, Sen. Begich spoke out on behalf of Alaskans who have been denied health insurance when they needed it most.

Begich Welcomes Exploration in Chukchi Sea

Sen. Begich today [welcomed approval](#) by the Minerals Management Service (MMS) of Shell Inc.'s exploration plan for oil and gas leases in the Chukchi Sea. "This is another positive step for Alaska's oil and gas industry, Begich said. "While

challenges remain, approval of this exploration plan demonstrates Alaska will continue to play an important role in helping meet America's energy needs." Approval of the exploration plan is a major hurdle in the exploration process. Shell still needs to obtain air permits from the Environmental Protection Agency and other administrative approvals before it can drill exploratory wells, currently planned for next summer. Begich said he will continue to work with Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to include protections that address concerns Alaskans and the rest of the nation have to develop these resources in a responsible manner. The successful development of these reserves and those of the Beaufort Sea are key to the long term viability of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline and the future of the Alaska natural gas pipeline, he said.

Talking Afghanistan w/ Secs. Clinton, Gates and Adm. Mullen



On Dec. 2, 2009, Sen. Begich participated in an Armed Services Committee hearing on the continuing role of the United States in Afghanistan. Witnesses before the committee included Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Adm. Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Defense Secretary Robert Gates. Sen. Begich posed questions about plans to improve and accelerate training of Afghan troops, reconstruction efforts, and civilian involvement. [Watch the exchange here.](#)

Supporting Gun Rights in Upcoming Supreme Court Case

As a [strong supporter](#) of the Second Amendment, Sen. Begich has joined a bipartisan message to the U.S. Supreme Court: The Second Amendment applies to all law-abiding Americans, no matter where they live in the country. Sen. Begich signed a

friend-of-the-court brief in favor of gun rights in the upcoming McDonald v. Chicago Supreme Court case. The case will determine, following the Court's landmark ruling in Heller v. District of Columbia, whether local and state governments retain the ability to enact any laws restricting firearms. "It is essential the Supreme Court affirm the constitutional rights granted to law-abiding citizens and protect the right of Alaskans to 'keep and bear arms'," Sen. Begich said. "I have been proud to join a bipartisan effort to support the gun rights of Americans and Alaskans. I hope for a firm declaration from the Supreme Court that strengthens the Second Amendment." The brief, led by Sens. Jon Tester (D-MT) and Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and Reps. Mark Souder (R-IN) and Mike Ross (D-AR), garnered the support of 309 senators and representatives, a record for any friend-of-the-court brief in U.S. history. At [59-pages in length](#), the brief was filed with the U.S. Supreme court on November 23, 2009.

Meeting w/ General Katkus



On Dec. 3, Sen. Begich met with Brig. Gen. Tom Katkus, adjutant general of the Alaska DMVA to talk about the National Guard, the ATG and other important Alaska issues.

Earn Tax Credits with Energy Improvements

Alaskans still have time to earn tax credits by purchasing energy-efficient products or renewable energy systems for homes. Many different types of stoves, insulation, roofing, doors, windows and other products are eligible for tax credits up to \$1,500. Some credits are available until the end of 2010; others go as late as 2016. For complete information and details [click here](#).

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