



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Geography Matters: Begich Presses USAF Chief of Staff**  
**Nominee on Alaska Military Importance**  
***General agrees: “Alaska is a very valuable platform--  
geography matters”***

U.S. Sen. Mark Begich again today pressed top brass in the U.S. Air Force on the important role Alaska plays in the nation’s defense, and received affirmative comments from the incoming Air Force Chief of Staff.

Begich, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), took part in the nomination hearing at SASC of General. Mark Welsh to be Chief of Staff, and Lt. Gen. Frank Grass to be general and Chief, National Guard Bureau.

“Alaska is a very valuable platform for the U.S. Air Force,” Gen. Welsh said at the hearing in response to questioning from Begich. “There’s a reason we have our newest fighter based in Alaska. There’s a reason we have a tanker airlift stationed in Alaska—a tremendous tanker unit by the way. There’s a reason we have tactical airlift rescue forces, command and control aircraft, geography matters.”

Gen. Welsh, who met with Sen. Begich in the senator’s DC office yesterday, went on to say that Air Force leadership recognizes the Air Force units stationed in Alaska, as well as the Army units, are critical to the posture of the U.S. for the Pacific theatre. And Alaska has some of the best training opportunities anywhere, events which enhance nation to nation relations.

“The range complex in Alaska, as you know, is phenomenal. Red Flag Alaska gives us an opportunity to do another thing that’s very important to me as a capability to provide in the future, if I’m confirmed, and that is to bring partners together.”

Sen. Begich also asked why the 168<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing at Eielson Air Force Base has not become an Association (add in active duty people to the existing Guard personal to maximize efficiency and allow the wing to meet more missions). Both General Grass and General Welsh committed to following up on this and looking into why there is not an Association.

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