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Begich Meets with Air Force Chief of Staff Nominee ***Discusses Alaska's importance in national defense***

Highlighting the strategic importance of Alaska to the nation's defense, U.S. Sen. Mark Begich today met with General Mark Welsh, nominee to be the next Chief of Staff of the Air Force. Begich, a member of the Armed Services Committee, used the meeting as an opportunity to discuss the recent attempt by the Air Force to move the F-16s from Eielson Air Force Base, and the future of the military at Eielson and in Alaska.

“General Welsh and I had an excellent discussion on how to increase transparency between the Department of Defense and Congress, and how we can all work better together in terms of exchanging quality and timely information when something like a squadron transfer comes up in the future,” Begich said. “General Welsh seems very aware of the important role Alaska plays in the military, especially when it comes to our strategic location and our training opportunities, and I look forward to working with him after he is confirmed.”

In addition to what happened between Congress and the Air Force on recent force structure proposals, Sen. Begich and Gen. Welsh discussed a number of other topics including new opportunities at Eielson since the squadron will not be relocating. Specifically, regarding missions involving unmanned aerial vehicles; the value of the state to the renewed focus on the Asia-Pacific and emerging focus on the Arctic; and the need to take care of service members and their families.

Gen. Welsh also said he looks forward to coming to Alaska to see the military installations first hand. His confirmation hearing at the Senate Armed Services Committee is tomorrow.

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