



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact: Julie Hasquet, Press Secretary

(907) 258-9304 office

(907) 350-4846 cell

## **Begich to Introduce “Alaska’s Heroes Card” for Veterans** *Goal to access health care at home, save money*

With the goal of giving Alaska’s veterans, particularly those living in rural areas, the ability to access health care in their own communities, U.S. Sen. Mark Begich announced today he is introducing *The Alaska Heroes Card Act of 2011*. Focused on veterans living off the road system, the heroes’ health card will allow Alaska veterans to have the choice to access care from clinics and other treatment facilities close to home.

“Veterans ask me repeatedly, ‘why can’t we get to the clinics and hospitals in our communities rather than travel to Anchorage or even Seattle?’ **Begich said.** “We need to constantly strive to better serve our veterans. This is one step forward for our veterans in the most remote parts of America.”

Begich made the announcement speaking to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Alaska 66<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention in Anchorage. He said during his recent travel to the village of Kwigillingok, he heard from veterans who can’t drive to a VA facility for treatment and one who relayed spending more than \$2,000 to travel from the village to Bethel and then to Anchorage to obtain medical care.

“This is simply unacceptable,” Begich said.

Begich said he will introduce his legislation next week when he returns to Washington. But *The Alaska Heroes Card Act of 2011* is already supported by local veterans and veteran support organizations.

“We are very supportive of any innovation that will enable our rural and remote veterans better access to the benefits each of these American heroes earned through service and sacrifice,” **said Ric Davidge, President of the Alaska Chapter, Vietnam Veterans of America.**

“The Alaska Heroes Card Act of 2011 ensures that America's most rural veterans can access their earned VA health care benefits, and they’ll be able to do so with their local health care provider and the provider will be able to receive payment from the VA,” **said Dan Winkelman, Vice President for Administration & General Counsel, Yukon Kuskokwim Health**

**Corporation.** “Given that there are no VA facilities in rural Alaska, yet Alaskans serve at the highest rate per capita of any state, the Alaska Hero's Card Act of 2011 ensures that America's most rural veterans are not forgotten.”

During a recent Senate hearing, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki indicated an interest in the legislation telling Begich we need to find a better way to serve veterans and not have to incur enormous costs to access a VA medical center if a care option is in the local community.

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