

Mark Begich

Debra Call

FOR ALASKA

WORKING FOR ALASKA'S VETERANS

Alaska is home to the largest per capita population of veterans in the nation. One in 10 Alaskans are veterans, and the percentage of women in the veteran and active-duty population has grown to over 14%. Mark Begich has a long record of supporting Alaska's veterans throughout his career in public service. As Governor, Mark will continue to implement creative ideas to serve the needs of Alaska's veterans – from health care to job training, entrepreneurship, and more.

Mark recognizes the contributions and sacrifices of the more than 70,000 veterans who make Alaska their home. Our state's history is closely intertwined with the sacrifices and contributions of our military. From that service, Alaska has benefited immeasurably, and we can never lose sight of what we owe our veterans - past, present and future.

As Governor, Mark will make sure our state meets its obligation to our veterans through access to health care, combating veteran homelessness, supporting military and veteran spouses, and providing job training and transition assistance.

A RECORD OF FIGHTING FOR VETERANS

Mark has advocated on behalf of veterans from the start of his career. As Mayor, Mark and Deborah Bonito established the First Lady's Military and Family Support Initiative, a partnership with the Armed Services YMCA that provides community fundraising support for local military and veteran families. It also hosts events throughout the year for military servicemembers, veterans, and their families to provide recreational activities and public recognition of their service and sacrifice.

Mark also created and chaired the U.S. Conference of Mayor's Community and Military Task Force to create a forum for mayors across the nation to share innovative approaches to foster healthy military and veteran families. The Task Force taught cities how to grow direct involvement in providing opportunity and public support to veterans.

As Mayor, Mark worked to implement a veteran hiring preference for the city and hired the first full-time staff to work on military and veterans' issues with the Municipality of Anchorage, helping to increase understanding of the unique issues facing our veterans and making the municipality more responsive to their needs.

As your US Senator, Mark Begich was proud to serve on the Veterans Affairs Committee, where he fought every day to honor veterans' service and cut through bureaucracy to provide the care and benefits they've earned through their sacrifice. He fought for legislation to increase the rates of veterans' disability compensation, add compensation for dependents, and strengthen support for disabled veterans.

As Senator, Mark introduced a bill and pushed the VA to establish the Alaska Heroes Card to expand health care accessibility for Alaska's veterans. The VA established a Memorandum of Understanding with the Indian Health Service to allow eligible veterans living in rural Alaska to access health care from a qualified facility in their community, instead of having to fly to a VA facility in Anchorage or Seattle. In addition, historic Tribal Agreements with 26 Alaska tribes allows them to provide care closer to home for Alaska Native and non-Native veterans.

He passed through the Senate his Veterans Access to Care bill, expanding new care models pioneered in Alaska to share resources with the Indian Health Service in order to provide local health care to rural Alaska veterans.

In the Senate, Mark also tackled veteran homelessness, and his Helping Homeless Veterans Act of 2013 (S. 287) passed the Senate by unanimous consent. This bill closed a loophole in federal law that prevents veterans who are homeless as the result of domestic violence from receiving certain benefits, including counseling and housing. The bill also increased the per diem payment for transitional housing assistance and authorized per diem payments to dependents of homeless veterans.

AS GOVERNOR, MARK WILL:

- Defend and support active-duty and veteran National Guard forces to ensure they are ready for their difficult jobs and provided the benefits they have earned once they complete their service;
- Develop combined state and local partnerships for early intervention and assistance to veterans who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless, or in need of mental health treatment;
- Continue to honor Alaska Territorial Guard veterans by recognizing their contributions in defending our state and country;
- Guarantee that women veterans receive equal services, benefits, and recognition of their service; and
- Enforce strict discipline and swift justice regarding sexual harassment and assault in the Guard and provide treatment and assistance to survivors.

JOB TRAINING AND TRANSITION ASSISTANCE

Mark has heard time and again from transitioning active duty servicemembers, veterans, and their spouses that there is no reliable jobs pipeline that translates the invaluable skills they acquired from the military into marketable private sector skills. Veterans learn a variety of key skills through their service, and all veterans deserve not only an administration dedicated to assisting them in turning to a new career, but also one that opens the door to training and educational opportunities. As Governor, Mark will:

- Strengthen the Veterans Service Officer (VSO) program and ensure veterans who want to pursue college or career and technical education have the financial support they need;
- Increase support for the Alaska Department of Labor's veteran job training program and vocational rehabilitation – Mark knows it's important we have a strong program that is closely integrated with the private sector so that veterans are prepared for the well-paying, in-demand jobs that will allow them to raise families here in Alaska;
- Help provide service animals to veterans in need of assistance, foster partnerships between the state, non-profit organizations, and veterans to more swiftly unite in-need veterans with service animals, and implement more coordinated and defined service animal guidelines at the state level;
- Make sure veterans are recruited into and trained for state government jobs and provided the hiring preference they deserve;
- Appoint members to a Veterans Advisory Committee to help direct State efforts and follow through to implement their advice;
- Work with the University system to create new programs to both inform veterans about their educational options and to develop and highlight courses of study that best utilize the skills gained through military service; and
- Cut bureaucratic red tape so military spouses can more easily transition into Alaska's economy using skills and licenses they have earned out of state.

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND COMBATING SUICIDE

Due to long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, more veterans are expected to enter the military and VA health care systems. We must provide Alaska veterans with quick, local access to health care, including mental health services.

Mark understands the mental health challenges veterans face after returning from service. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) are far too common among our nation's heroes, and Alaska's veterans are faced with a shortage in mental health providers.

Many veterans and their families face challenges in transitioning from military to civilian life, and often struggle coping with those challenges.

As governor, Mark will:

- Expand availability of mental health services, particularly important for veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury and other health conditions suffered during combat deployments;
- Tackle our health care challenges and recruit doctors and providers to address the ongoing shortage in our state, especially in rural communities;
- Explore partnerships between the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the federal Veterans Administration to facilitate treatment and provide easier access to benefits;
- Dedicate additional resources to early intervention, particularly among veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness; and
- Fully staff a 24/7 Hotline for veterans to call for help receiving the treatment and benefits they need, with personnel with the expertise to connect them to all the services they have earned.