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Begich Highlights Success of Alaska Health Program ***“Nuka Model of Care” touted in Senate floor speech***

Highlighting the success of a health care program developed by Alaska Native leaders more than a decade ago, U.S. Sen. Mark Begich today joined his freshmen Democratic senators for their weekly series of speeches about the need for health reform.

Begich outlined the Nuka Model of Care, a program based in Anchorage at the Southcentral Foundation, a non-profit health system serving about 55,000 Alaska Natives. Begich touted the program as an example of a primarily government-funded plan that is highly successful in lowering health care costs and keeping people healthy.

“Like many other health providers in this country, the Foundation recognized an alarming contradiction: As health costs continued to increase, the health status of their patients only got worse. More dollars going into health care only resulted in worse health outcomes.

“So they decided to change. And from the ground up they built a system of “customer-driven” health care. The Nuka Model creates teams of health providers – doctors, nurses, medical assistants – to work with each patient. It requires doctors to listen to the patient, to really hear what the customers are saying about their lifestyles, their jobs, their families - everything that affects overall health,” Begich said.

Begich said his speech today was partially motivated by previous comments from Sen. Richard Burr (R-North Carolina) who said that if somebody showed him a successful government plan that pays for prevention, wellness, and chronic disease management he would quit coming to the Senate floor and quit talking about the lack of reform.

In his speech today, Begich pointed out the Nuka Model of Care is funded about half by the Indian Health Service and one-third by Medicaid or Medicare with outstanding results. He cited statistics of the program’s success:

- 50 percent drop in Urgent Care and Emergency Room visits;
- 53 percent reduction in hospital admissions;
- 65 percent drop in need for expensive specialists;
- Childhood immunization rate of 93 percent, well above the state and national averages;

- Much better management of diabetes, with 50 percent of patients kept in the pre-diabetes stage instead of worsening into full diabetes;
- Overall satisfaction rate among patients is 91 percent.

“The Nuka model is attracting attention from all over the world, as it should,” Begich said. “And I’m sure there are similar government-backed stories throughout the country.”

Begich urged senators not to say no to health reform just because of partisan differences. Let’s celebrate examples of innovation and excellence that work, no matter where they come from, he said.

“My remarks are not intended to single out any one senator. But I will say this: As we debate health insurance reform in this chamber, let’s arm ourselves with facts, and with open minds.

“I am proud of the Nuka Model in Alaska, of the people who started it a decade ago, and of the people who are making it work today,” he said.

View the speech at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bS27dQkQNAw>.

You can also learn more about the Nuka Model at <http://www.southcentralfoundation.com/services/index.ak>

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