



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Wednesday, November 16, 2011

**CONTACTS:**

Begich: Julie Hasquet, (907) 258-9304

Reid: Adam Jentleson, (202) 224-2939

Murray: Matt McAlvanah, (202) 224-2939

DSOC: Betsy McManus, (202) 228-1805

## **SENS. REID, BEGICH AND MURRAY HOST DISCUSSION WITH VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS**

*Discussion focused on continued commitment to provide a seamless transition for veterans returning home*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Today, U.S. Senator Mark Begich (D-Alaska), Chairman of the Senate Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Chair of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, hosted veterans service organizations from around the country to discuss innovative solutions to challenges facing veterans.

Building on last week's passage of the *VOW to Hire Heroes Act* and a tele-townhall discussion hosted by the Senate Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee with veterans from around the country, today's discussion emphasized Senate Democrats' ongoing commitment to create jobs for veterans. The Senators focused on the need to ensure a seamless transition for veterans and their families from combat to civilian life, and reaffirmed Democrats' commitment to fight for veterans' benefits and services.

"Last week the Senate passed legislation that will help spur hiring among the nearly 900,000 out-of-work veterans in this country and in Nevada. This includes a quarter of a million young veterans of the global fight against terrorism," said Senator Reid. "But our conversation today made it very clear that we need to do more to maintain our commitment to our nation's heroes. I look forward to continue working with veterans and the organizations that represent them, as we seek to address the challenges they face. They deserve nothing less from the country they served so honorably."

"There's no question that our troops return home from duty with tremendous qualifications and skill sets that translate to good civilian jobs," said Senator Begich. "I'm proud the Senate honored our commitment to veterans by passing the *VOW to Hire Heroes Act* as part of our efforts to help veterans find employment and make the transition home a little easier. However, our work is not done. Congress, federal agencies and veterans service organizations must continue to work together to find solutions that will put our veterans back to work and ease the transition for our veterans and their families."

"Last week, with the help of many of the VSOs present today, we took a huge step forward in rethinking the way we treat our men and women in uniform after they leave the military," said Senator Murray. "This landmark legislation will not only help put America's veterans back to work, but also give them the self-confidence, financial security, and dignity that a job provides. I am grateful for the constant feedback on this issue, and many others, that our veterans service organizations have provided. I will continue to work to make sure our veterans have the job opportunities they need and the health care and benefits they've earned."

Last week, Senate Democrats led passage of the *VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011*, a bipartisan bill that will help returning veterans find and transition into civilian jobs. This legislation - which includes job training provisions from both the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committee bills, and President Obama's American Jobs Act proposal to incentivize hiring of veterans through a tax credit – will ensure that service members transitioning to civilian life receive the job training skills they need to get back to work.

"Many of our newest veterans and their families are dealing with the legacy of a decade of war," said Joyce Wessel Raezer, Executive Director of the National Military Family Association. "They need the opportunity to prepare for that transition before they leave military service and access to a broad range of support services when they become veterans."

In addition, General Andrew Davis, Executive Director of the Reserve Officers Association, emphasized the need for job opportunities for reservists.

"Today the men and women of our nation's reserve components face a challenge equally unique to their role as citizen warriors," said General Davis. "After ten years of critical support to overseas operations, more than one in four veteran reservists are now unemployed. These service members are literally twice the citizen and yet they are nearly three times as likely to be unemployed."

The unemployment rate for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan has risen to 12.1% over the last year, representing a quarter of a million veterans. Of those, two thirds are younger than 35 years old. Additionally, it is the youngest group of veterans having the hardest time finding work. In 2010, young male veterans who served during the Gulf War-era II had an unemployment rate of 21.9%.

For more information on the *VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011*, visit <http://democrats.senate.gov/news/>.

### **About the Senate Democratic Steering & Outreach Committee**

The Senate Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee is dedicated to fostering dialogue between Senate Democrats and community leaders from across the nation. Each year, the Steering Committee hosts several meetings with advocates, policy experts, and elected officials to discuss key priorities and enlist their help in the development of the Democratic agenda in the Senate. We are committed to serving as a liaison between Senate Democratic offices and advocacy groups and intergovernmental organizations. The Steering Committee is one of two Democratic Leadership Committees in the Senate. The Steering Committee is chaired by Senator Mark Begich (AK) and vice chaired by Senator Daniel K. Akaka (HI).

###