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## **Hearing to Showcase Success of Alaska Native Corporations**

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Saying federal legislation designed to help Alaska Native people prosper is working as it was intended, U.S. Sen. Mark Begich today praised the success of Alaska Native corporations which is helping improve the well being of Alaska's indigenous people.

"Today, thanks to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and congressional action to permit Alaska Native corporations to participate in the SBA's 8(a) program, the story of Alaska Native people is one of unprecedented success," Sen. Begich says in his prepared comments before the committee. "The numbers tell part of the story. Educational attainment has soared, with about half of Alaska Natives earning high school diplomas and nearly a third with at least some college. Less than 25 percent live below the poverty line. Three-quarters live in homes with the basic clean water and sewer facilities we all take for granted."

Begich's comments came in response to today's hearing by the Senate Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight about Alaska Native Corporations and their involvement with the Small Business Administration's 8(a) Business Development Program. Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill, subcommittee chair, called the hearing in May to examine what she says is an unfair advantage under the 8(a) program. At the time, Begich and Sen. Lisa Murkowski wrote McCaskill expressing their concern over the panel's investigation and the potential impact on the Alaska companies.

"While we welcome fair and just oversight of the Native American 8(a) program to ensure its integrity, transparency, and accountability, we are also concerned that the ANCs will be inadvertently harmed," the Alaska senators wrote to McCaskill on May 15.

In his testimony at the committee hearing today, Sen. Begich will talk about the success of the ANCs, the jobs they create, and the economic stability they bring to many of Alaska's communities.

"After struggling in their early years, all 12 of Alaska's in-state regional profit corporations are profitable, generating about \$4 billion in revenues for their Native shareholders. ANSCA corporations are among our state's top employers, providing jobs for more than 30,000 people," Begich will tell the committee.

Additionally, Begich points out Alaska Native Corporations contribute enormously to educational scholarships, cultural preservation, elder services, community development, and to support the subsistence lifestyle that is such a vital part of their culture and identity.

Begich cites a recent Inspector General (IG) report of the Small Business Administration (SBA) that says there are just over 200 ANC participants in the 8(a) program and their work across the nation is generating billions of dollars in benefits to their shareholders.

"This continues to raise the standard of living for thousands of Alaska Native people who live in 200 villages and communities across my state. There are scores of compelling success stories we could document if time permitted."

Begich says he recognizes the 8(a) program is not perfect and he agrees with many of the IG's recommendations that the SBA needs to clarify its procedures and fully staff its oversight mission.

"I look forward to working with this subcommittee and the Congress to ensure that this program continues to work properly and effectively for Alaska Native corporations and all Americans," Begich said.

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