

Indian Health Care Improvement Act Reauthorization of 2007

Rally – Wednesday, September 12, 2007

Joe Garcia, President, National Congress of American Indians – Talking Points

- Thank Rep. Frank Pallone for introducing H.R. 1328
- Thank Sen. Byron Dorgan for introducing S. 1200
- Thank Members of Congress for their commitment to American Indian and Alaskan Native issues

- **Reauthorization will modernize Indian health care**
 - Life expectancy of Native Americans is **six years less** than any other race in America
 - 13 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native deaths occur in those younger than 25, which is a **rate three times higher** than the U.S. population
 - Native Americans are 650 percent more likely to die from tuberculosis;
 - 318 percent more likely to die from diabetes;
 - And 204 percent more likely to suffer accidental death compared to other groups

- **More programs for behavioral health**
 - Native Americans are 630 percent more likely to die from alcoholism

- **More money for mental health programs**
 - **Fewer** health care professionals to treat American Indians and Alaskan Natives than the rest of the U.S. population
 - American Indian youth are **twice as likely** to commit suicide than any other minority group

I am H. Sally Smith, Chairman of the National Indian Health Board, and I am thrilled to welcome you to this Rally in support of the Reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act. I am proud to stand here with our sister Indian organizations united in this purpose! Thank you for showing your support for Indian Health Care Today!

Remember: Indian Health Care is not just an American Indian or Alaska Native Issue – It is an AMERICAN ISSUE!

Few people in the Country have demonstrated that more than the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs who has tirelessly fought to elevate America's understanding plight of American Indian health care. From introducing the reauthorization bill to marching down to the Senate floor time and time again to elevate these issues... Senator Dorgan, thank you for your inspiring dedication to Indian People and support for advancing Indian health care.

And I am personally moved and honored to be able to thank the new Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for her unrelenting support for our People. A great champion for both Alaska Natives and American Indians, for health care and beyond... my personal friend, Senator Lisa Murkowski.

And, thank you to Senator Baucus – Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee - man of the hour – who literally –moments ago – lead the effort to successfully move the Indian Health Care Improvement Act out of Finance and to the next level... Thank you, Sir.

On August 1st, Majority Leader Reid promised that if the bill is reported out of the Finance Committee, “we will find a way to bring it to the Floor. It is the right thing to do.” Majority Leader Reid – Indian Country is ready! Please schedule Senate Floor time for the Indian Health Care Improvement Act Now!!!

I am sorry that our many friends in the House of Representatives could not join us here today...Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman, John Dingell ... Congressman Frank Pallone, Health Subcommittee Chairman and Resources Committee Chairman Nick Rahall – co-authors of the House version.

Thank you to all of you for your support in the House – for your work and your vision...while there remains much to be done WE ARE WITH YOU.

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Reauthorization of the IHCI A is well overdue.

The reauthorization of the IHCI A will help address health disparities in Indian Country and will improve and modernize the Indian health care delivery system. It has been 15 years since the bill was reauthorized and 30 years since it was first enacted in 1976.

In your packets, we have included a copy of an advertisement printed in the Roll Call this morning. The ad features a picture of President Gerald R. Ford who signed the IHCI A into law on October 1, 1976. In his signing statement, he wrote:

“Indian people still lag behind the American people as a whole in achieving and maintaining good health. I am signing this bill because of my own conviction that our first Americans should not be last in opportunity.”

Since its original enactment, the American health care system has evolved. However, in the last 30 years, the health disparities in Indian Country remain the worst of all U.S. populations – in some measures – such as diabetes, we are the have the worst rates in the world.

We first Americans – should not be last in health care.
With your support Congress – we will no longer be last!

On August 20th I sent a letter to all Tribal Leaders of the 561 Tribes in this Country to ask them to sign on to an All Tribes Letter in support of the IHCIA. It is our intention to deliver this Letter to all 540 Members of Congress signed on by all 561 Tribes next week! Next month, we want Members of Congress to bring S. 1200 and H.R. 1328 to the Floors of Congress for a vote!