

Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

STATEMENT OF APPRECIATION CONGRESSIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN CAUCUS October 30, 2007

Urban American Indians and Alaska Natives together now represent the largest group of Native American people in the nation, and have been mostly invisible until just the past few years. Recent reports confirm that a large portion of these "urban Indians" experience severe health problems. Conditions such as alcoholism, diabetes, cardio-vascular disease, and depression are found in higher rates among urban Indians than others living in the same locations, and their health status parallels Indians living on reservations. Efforts to reverse these conditions continue to fall short due to inadequate funding and a lack of visibility that thwarts the opportunities to get needed help.

While the United States Congress has an obligation to provide health services to Indians on Indian reservations, it is important that we do not lose sight of the fact that many Indians live in cities as well. Congress must provide needed funding, but it is important that state and local governments, as well as the private sector, chip in. The recent report by the Urban Indian Health Commission, sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, brings this fact to light, and recommends that all federal, state, and local efforts to address health disparities and minority health concerns include the often neglected urban Indian population.

We, the leadership of the Congressional Native American Caucus, express our appreciation to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the eleven members of the Urban Indian Health Commission for their commitment to the well-being of urban American Indians and Alaska Natives. Furthermore, we hope that all those responsible for addressing the problem of health disparities in minority populations will include urban Indians as an important constituent.

Sincerely,



Dale E. Kildee, Co-chair



Rick Renzi, Co-chair



Frank Pallone, Vice-chair



Patrick Kennedy, Vice-chair



Ron Kind, Vice-chair



Tom Udall, Vice-chair



WESTERN
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ASSOCIATION

Dave Freudenthal
Governor of Wyoming
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Jon M. Huntsman, Jr.
Governor of Utah
Vice Chairman

Pam O. Inmann
Executive Director

Headquarters:
1600 Broadway
Suite 1700
Denver, CO 80202

303-623-9378
Fax 303-534-7309

Washington, D.C. Office:
400 N. Capitol Street, N.W.
Suite 388
Washington, D.C. 20001

202-624-5402
Fax 202-624-7707

www.westgov.org

November 1, 2007

To All Interested Parties:

During the 20th century, the urbanization of Indians steadily increased. Urban American Indians now represent the largest segment of Indian people in the nation yet, because they live in large metropolitan areas, their unique healthcare needs go unnoticed or unaddressed.

Targeted federal efforts to address urban Indians' healthcare issues have fallen short. Recent studies have shown that urban Indians experience severe health disparities and have difficulty gaining access to needed health care.

A recent report, *Invisible Tribes: Urban Indians and Their Health in a Changing World*, illustrates the importance of assuring that urban Indians are not overlooked in planning efforts to address health disparities. The report was released by the Urban Indian Health Commission, a group organized by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Seattle Indian Health Board. The report highlights some of the urban Indian healthcare disparities and it urges all levels of government and private philanthropy to work together to help reduce these disparities.

As lead Governors for the Western Governors' Association and on behalf of our colleagues, we extend our hand in helping assure that all Americans, including urban Indians, receive the health care they need. We applaud the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for supporting this effort and thank the members of the Urban Indian Health Commission for bringing this matter to the public's attention.

Sincerely,

Christine O. Gregoire
Governor of Washington
Lead Governor AI/AN Health

M. Michael Rounds
Governor of South Dakota
Lead Governor AI/AN Health