



## Open Tribal Letter

### Supporting the Reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act

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June 2009

Tribal leaders across this Nation applaud the commitment of the Administration and Congressional Leadership as you launch the National agenda to address the need for health care reform for all Americans. These efforts are timely given the current statistics that report 46 million people are uninsured and another 25 million are underinsured in the United States. Tribal governments are acutely aware of the need to improve the quality of health care services, maximize the health care funding and improve the delivery of and access to health care for the American Indian and Alaska Native population. For nearly two decades we have consistently advocated for the reauthorization of basic authorities and the modernization of an Indian health care system that currently falls short of responding to the health needs of our people.

Now, when the rest of America is focused on health care reform, we must remain vigilant and not allow our efforts to languish in pursuit of getting the Indian Health Care Improve Act reauthorized. To do so would allow the unique relationship between sovereign Tribal Nations and the United States to be compromised into a health care system that does not address our local and long term needs. We ask that you not only focus on a one-stop-shop package of health reform for all Americans, but that you also continue to work with us in updating our health care package which will fulfill the health care needs of American Indian and Alaska Native people.

We recognize that there is a National need for health care reform. However, as frequently noted, the United States is the only developed country that does not guarantee health care coverage for all of its citizens. The irony of reforming health care is that it means more to Indian people than fixing a broken system. Compared to what we were promised, health care in Indian Country is an atrocity; funding that does not adequately provide quality health care for our people, substandard health conditions due to government inefficiency, and pitting Tribe against Tribe for construction, repair and maintenance of health facilities, just to name a few.

We have been patiently expecting and remain very optimistic about the passage of the reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act. We have sacrificed much, yet we continue to be deprived of the right to quality health care... a trust obligation agreed to between Great Men during a time when you had nothing and we had everything to offer.

Health Care Reform in 2009 is not a discussion that is inclusive of and addresses the dire health needs of Indian Country. We will continue to push until we get the recognition and the respect that is due Indian Country and our people. We will continue to strongly advocate for the reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act while others take the time to decide, develop and identify what is needed in major health care reform legislation!

ORIGINAL



NAME/TITLE

AFFILIATION

Brian Cladoosby Chairman

Swinomish Tribe

Henry Pagey Chairman

Lummi

Norma Jean Louie, Council

Coeur d'Alene Tribe

Marge Anderson

Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe

Amey Shippentowok Games

Council Puyallup Tribe

William M. Miller Chair's

POCAHALONTO BAND OF POCAHONTON

Zililia M. Andy

YAKAMA Nation

THOMAS LARGO SR. COUNCIL

SALT RIVER PIMA/MARICOPA INDIAN COMMUNITY

Ryan Johnson ELD

Big Sandy Rancheria

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Chippewa Cree Tribe, Montana

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Tohono O'odham Nation

Jeanne A. Jensen

Confederated Colville Tribes

Cheryl Deidre

Shiwi Tribe

Wink Soderberg

CONFED TRIBES OF GRANDE PRAIRIE

Tono Frankin

Kashia Tono Tribe

Jee Garcia

Lillian Sparks

ITEA (Rosebud Sioux Tribe)

Wendell Jim

CTWS

Candace Shelton

FASD Center for Excellence

Shawna Gavin

CTUR

Sandi Blake - Council

Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe

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FOREST OF POTAWATOMI

Brenda Jacobson Shipodock

Forest Co. Potawatomi

Jillie Butler - Tribal Council

Confederated Tribes of Siletz

Deborah Scott -

Cherokee

ORIGINAL

NAME/TITLE

AFFILIATION

First Alaskan Institute

Liz Cheney, Vice-President

Tlingit/Haida

BEN SMITH, IHS Deputy Director, OTSG

NAVAJO

Anna Odeh, IHS Program Analyst, OTSG

Crow/Sioux

Glen Gobin Tribal Council Tulalip Tribes

W. Ron Allen, Chairman/CEO

Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe

Bill Anoatubby, Governor

Chickasaw Nation

Gene Steens J. V.P.

Ceixaalt Nation

NATIONAL Indian Gaming ASSOC - ONEIDA NATION - WL.

Bruce Patten

PRESIDENT USET 25 TRIBES

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