

National Indian Health Board



The Red Feather Of Hope And Healing

Press Release
September 16, 2009
For Immediate Release

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U.S. Senator says the trail of broken promises doesn't have to continue for American Indians and Alaskan Natives

Washington, DC – In a speech at the National Indian Health Board Annual Consumer Conference in Washington, U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) said the United States signed the line which promised health care for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

“Our government promised it. That trail of broken promises can end, it doesn't have to continue, but it ought to end now,” said Senator Dorgan. He gave attendees at the meeting an update about the health care reform issues that directly affect their communities.

Senator Dorgan briefly addressed the Reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA) which he felt was good legislation, but said that it took 17 years to get the bill to the Senate. He was saddened to see that an amendment regarding abortion was attached to the IHCIA which prevented it from passing.

“This is an issue of life and death,” said Dorgan, “but in a couple of weeks, the IHCIA will be reintroduced to the Senate.” Tribal leaders and health professionals from various AI/AN communities in the audience applauded in support of that idea.

Senator Dorgan shared his concern about seeing the clusters of suicides occurring in AI/AN communities. On August 6, Dorgan sponsored Senate Bill 1635- 7th Generation Promise: Indian Youth Suicide Prevention Act of 2009 a bill to establish an Indian Youth telemental health demonstration project that would enhance the provision of mental health services to Indian youth.

During the hearings about it, he had the opportunity to meet with kids and talk about their lives and the lives of their friends. “I wanted to give kids hope and help. I am determined to make that happen,” said Senator Dorgan.

Talking candidly about the issues and concerns people have raised in talking about health care reform, he said there are some people who are worried about rationed health care. “If anyone knows about rationed health care, it is you. It has been done routinely, daily, monthly, and across the country. Your health care has been rationed for too long, and that should be on the front page of every paper - that your needs are unmet,” said Dorgan.

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The National Indian Health Board advocates on behalf of all Tribal Governments and American Indians/Alaska Native in their efforts to provide quality health care. Visit www.nihb.org for more information.



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