

June 16, 2004

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The Honorable Tommy Thompson, Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Thompson:

I am writing to express the support of the American Bar Association for the reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA). Recognizing the United States' continuing obligation to provide adequate health care to American Indians and Alaska Natives, the ABA adopted policy in February 2004 urging Congress to reauthorize the Act. The resolution and its accompanying background report is attached for your reference. While only the resolution constitutes ABA policy, the report provides useful information that supports our position that IHCIA needs timely legislative action.

Notwithstanding the progress that has been made since the founding of the Indian Health Service, American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to experience dramatic health disparities and high mortality rates compared to the rest of the American population. For instance, the mortality rate from diabetes for American Indians and Alaska Natives is 420 percent higher than that for the general population; from accidents, 280 percent; from suicide, 190 percent; and from alcoholism, 770 percent higher.

As you know, both chambers of Congress are considering legislation to reauthorize IHCIA. Congressional action is critical and overdue--IHCIA has not been reauthorized since 1992. In 2000, the Act's authorizing provisions for federal funding and specific IHS programs expired. Congress extended the Act's funding authority through 2001, but since then has relied upon the Snyder Act to justify federal funding for Indian health care programs. Reauthorization of IHCIA would authorize funding for programs more targeted to the needs of the Native American community and more specifically geared to bringing Indian health care into parity with that provided to the majority of other Americans.

Enactment this Congress of reauthorizing legislation, such as HR 2440, is an important first step to improving the quality of health care for Native Americans and Alaska Natives. We urge you to urge Congress to support speedy reauthorization of IHCIA.

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Thank you for considering the views of the ABA on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Robert D. Evans

cc: The Honorable Ben Nighthorse Campbell  
The Honorable Daniel Inouye  
The Honorable Richard Pombo  
The Honorable Nick Rahall

attachment