



Representative Ann Kirkpatrick
Arizona's First Congressional District

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Rep. Kirkpatrick Continues to Lead Push for IHS Improvements, Calls on Leadership to Keep Key Measure in Final Reform Bill

*23 Members of Congress Co-Sign Congresswoman's Letter Supporting
Reauthorization of Indian Health Care Improvement Act*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Continuing to lead the fight for better health services in Indian Country, Representative Ann Kirkpatrick yesterday sent a letter to Congressional leadership calling for reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA) to be included in any final health insurance reform bill. The Congresswoman, who represents the largest Native American population of any Congressional district in the country, was joined by 23 other Members of Congress in supporting this important reform.

IHCIA would sustain, expand and modernize the Indian Health Service, which provides comprehensive health services for American Indians and Alaska Natives. It makes long-awaited improvements to the system, enhancing care and better addressing the unique needs of folks on tribal lands.

“I have been fighting for Washington to live up to its responsibilities in Indian Country, and addressing the shortfalls in health care is a critical part of that fight,” said Rep. Kirkpatrick. **“With this reauthorization, we would be closer than ever to getting the modern medical services we have been working towards.”**

“The federal government has a trust obligation to provide for the wellness of our tribal communities. After more than a decade of delays, we have an opportunity to meet that obligation, and we cannot let it slip away.”

This long-overdue reauthorization has been under consideration since 1999, and has been included in both the House and Senate versions of the health insurance reform legislation. Rep. Kirkpatrick played a key role in the original effort to add the measure to the House bill.

“While it remains unclear when or if this Congress will continue the reform process, I am determined to make sure that this program is not left out. Improvements for IHS must be a part of any final health reform package,” said Rep. Kirkpatrick. **“If there is no final bill, we will just have to find another way to move forward with the reauthorization.”**

In addition to fighting for improvements to IHS in the health insurance reform process, Rep. Kirkpatrick is co-sponsoring H.R. 2708. This bipartisan stand-alone bill would also reauthorize IHCIA. She is committed to using whatever path is necessary to make progress for the Native American community.

The Congresswoman’s letter is included below:

Dear Madam Speaker:

As you know, final passage of H.R. 3962, the Affordable Health Care for America Act, and H.R. 3590, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act as passed by the Senate, included reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA). If included in the final health reform bill, the IHCIA would sustain, expand, and modernize the Indian Health Service (IHS), which provides comprehensive health services for American Indians and Alaska Natives. Legislation to reauthorize the IHCIA has been pending before the Congress since 1999, and enacting this long-overdue reauthorization will provide much needed improvements and certainty to the delivery of Indian health services.

Enormous disparities in accessing high-quality health care exist in Indian Country. The best way to move toward health care parity for tribal communities is to ensure that Indian health care providers are able to participate equally in the health care delivery system. IHCIA would bring us closer to that goal. At the same time, it is essential that health insurance reform respects and fulfills the federal responsibility to provide quality health care to Native Americans, while remaining sensitive to American Indian, Alaska Native and Indian health providers’ unique needs.

It is a trust obligation of the federal government to provide for the wellness of our tribal communities. As Congress works toward addressing health care reform, it is vital that reauthorization of the IHCIA is retained in the final product. Thank you for your consideration.

Signatories include House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rep. Nick Rahall (WV), House Native American Caucus Chairman Rep. Dale Kildee (MI), Natural Resources Committee subcommittee chairs Reps. Raul Grijalva (AZ) and Grace Napolitano (CA), and Rep. Frank Pallone (NJ), who introduced H.R. 2708. Other co-signers include Reps. Neil Abercrombie (HI), Joe Baca (CA), Shelley Berkley (NV), Dan Boren (OK), Martin Heinrich (NM), Mazie Hirono (HI), Jay Inslee (WA), Ben Ray Lujan (NM), Betty McCollum (MN), Walt Minnick (ID), Jim Oberstar (MN), John Olver (MA), Laura Richardson (CA), Kurt Schrader (OR), Harry Teague (NM), Tim Walz (MN) and David Wu (OR), and Del. Eni Faleomavaega (AS).

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