

## **TRIBE PUSHES FOR INDIAN HEALTH CARE ACT**

PLUMMER – The Coeur d’Alene Tribe is urging the United States Senate to approve Indian Health Care Improvement Reauthorization and Extension Act as part of the national health care reform bill being debated by Congress.

The U.S. Senate Indian Affairs Committee approved the act (S. 1790) on Thursday and the U.S. Senate is expected to vote on the Legislation in the near future. The act would give Native Americans increased access to government health programs and improve Indian Health Services.

“This is extremely important healthcare legislation for Indian Country,” said Coeur d’Alene Tribe Chairman Chief Allan. “The U.S. Senate needs to include this act in the overall healthcare reform bill.”

Last year, the U.S. Senate passed a similar bill that was defeated in the U.S. House of Representatives when it became tangled in the abortion debate.

This year, Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, spearheaded the legislation in committee and pushed it forward.

“Mike Crapo’s leadership has been awesome,” Allan said. “He has represented the five tribes in Idaho and the nation by recognizing the deficiencies in health care for Native Americans.”

The bill permanently reauthorizes all Indian health care programs, making unnecessary for tribes to go to Congress in the future. The last extension expired in 2001.

“Permanent reauthorization of the IHCA is critical to ensure that authorities are in place to bring Indian health care into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to reduce health disparities in Indian Country,” wrote U.S. Rep. Walt Minnick, D-Idaho, in a Nov. 20 letter to President Obama, Sen. Harry Reid and Sen. Byron Dorgan, who is Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs.

Nationally, health care expenditures are \$6,538 per capita compared to \$2,349 for Indian Health Service users.

“The U.S. Government spends more on average taking care of federal prisoners than on Indians,” Allan said. “Sadly, the government needs to live up to its trust responsibilities, which have never been fully funded.”

President Obama has proposed a 13 percent increase in IHS funding for next year. The increase would cover pay raises, staffing of new facilities, and new equipment. IHS received \$3.6 billion this year, which it says is about half of the amount it actually needs to operate successfully.

The act also would increase the recruitment and retention of health care professionals on rural Indian reservations. It also would authorize long-term care for Native Americans, such as assisted living and community based care. The current law doesn’t provide funding for these needs.

Also, the act would establish mental and behavioral programs, such as treating and preventing fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, child abuse and domestic violence programs.