



For Immediate Release
January 22, 2008

Contact: Alarie Ray-Garcia
505-476-2248

Governor Bill Richardson Urges Congress to Pass the Indian Health Care Improvement Act

SANTA FE- Governor Bill Richardson today sent a letter to congressional leaders, including Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, urging them to pass the Indian Health Care Improvement Act.

“Passage of this vital legislation is long overdue. “Governor Bill Richardson said. “States like New Mexico depend on it to adequately serve the health needs of our American Indian citizens.”

The IHCIA expired in 2000. The Senate is currently considering reauthorization and Governor Richardson is pushing the House of Representatives to do the same.

American Indians in New Mexico, and across the nation, are among the poorest population, and experience the highest rates of cancer, obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Further, American Indians have limited access to care. Due to the under-funding of the Indian Health Service (IHS) system New Mexico’s Indian population has been adversely affected.

“Thank you for your consideration and for your work to rectify this national travesty,” Governor Bill Richardson said. “I urge quick action by both chambers to come to agreement as quickly as possible so that this obligation to our Indian people is addressed and restored.”

###



State of New Mexico

Office of the Governor

Bill Richardson
Governor

January 22, 2008

The Honorable Harry M. Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Boehner
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Reid, Senator McConnell, Speaker Pelosi and Representative Boehner:

I am writing to urge you to pass the *Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA)*. The IHCIA expired in 2000 and reauthorization is long overdue. I am pleased that the Senate is considering *S. 1200* and hope the House quickly follows suit.

First enacted in 1976, IHCIA has been reauthorized four times and has incorporated numerous amendments over the years. Passage of this legislation is vital for those states that have large American Indian and Alaska Native populations, such as New Mexico, where they are 10% of our population. For the past several years, I have advocated for the reauthorization of IHCIA by the Congress because I see first hand the impact that inadequately funded health care has on our citizens.

States such as New Mexico cannot nor should not bear sole responsibility for the federal government's trust to provide adequate health and human services for Indian people. American Indians in New Mexico, and across the nation, are among the poorest population, and experience the highest rates of cancer, obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Further, American Indians have limited access to care. Due to the under-funding of the Indian Health Service (IHS) system New Mexico's Indian population has been adversely affected.

Thank you for your consideration and for your work to rectify this national travesty. I urge quick action by both chambers to come to agreement as quickly as possible so that this obligation to our Indian people is addressed and restored.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Richardson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bill Richardson
Governor

BR/mw/tm/jj

CC: The Honorable Pete Domenici
The Honorable Jeff Bingaman
The Honorable Tom Udall
The Honorable Heather Wilson
The Honorable Steve Pearce