

**Prepared Statement of Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell
Vice Chairman - Committee on Indian Affairs
Oversight Hearing on American Indian and Alaska Native Elder Health Issues**

July 10, 2002

Thank you and good morning to everyone here today.

Though we normally do not make the headlines in the *New York Times* or *Washington Post* with our activities, this Committee works on really critical issues that affect Indian people across the country.

Today's hearing is one of those hearings and it involves Native Elders — a group revered in Indian cultures but also a group that is often quiet and in the background when it comes to public debate on matters affecting them.

As the 2000 Census makes clear, the Native population --- like the U.S. population generally -- is growing at a very fast pace and the number of Native elders will only increase in future years. As it turns out, with most Indian people under age 25, we will see an explosion in the Native Elder population in the coming decades.

I believe that now is the time to prepare for the problems that may face that generation.

Ongoing for 3 years now, the Administration on Aging has chronicled the results of their Survey On Native Elder Health.

Unfortunately and as we both know Mr. Chairman, life expectancy is lower; chronic disease rates are higher; and health status is poorer for Native elders.

I believe that the measure of a great nation like ours is how we treat our military veterans and how we treat our elders. I know we need to do better on both counts.

I am hopeful that this hearing will provide the Committee with ideas — innovative and effective — that we can advance in the months ahead.

With that, I would only say that now that I am considered a “Native elder”, I have great interest in what our witnesses have to say and I look forward to hearing from them.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.