

Prepared Statement of Ben Nighthorse Campbell
Chairman, Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
Joint Hearing of the
House Resources Committee & Senate Indian Affairs Committee
On Bills to Reauthorize the Indian Health Care
Improvement Act (H.R.2440 and S.556)

July 16, 2003

Good morning and welcome to the Joint Hearing of the House Resources Committee and Senate Indian Affairs Committee on Bills to Reauthorize the Indian Health Care Improvement Act.

The two bills before our Committees (S.556 and H.R. 2440) reflect literally years of hard work by Indian tribal Leaders, the National Steering Committee, and various Federal officials.

Today is the second in a series of hearings the Committee has held on the Reauthorization. We will receive testimony on the areas of Indian health disparities, Indian health facilities, and urban Indian health issues.

Most members know the shameful state of Indian health. We know the poor health status of Indian people because we've read the statistics and we've heard the personal stories of those who've lost loved ones due to alcoholism, suicide, or homicide.

It is distressing to me to know that more Indian people die from chronic diseases than any other ethnic group in this country and that Indians suffer from some of the highest rates of diabetes in the world.

A key contributor to the poor health condition of Indian people is the lack of safe drinking water and adequate waste disposal facilities. To date, the needs for these basic health services are still left unmet across Indian Country.

Of course, there is always the need for safe and accessible health care facilities. I imagine that the "priority construction list" is still very long which is why it is imperative that we develop and enact creative financing mechanisms to renovate or replace old and dilapidated health care facilities.

It is also important that we address the needs of the urban Indian health system especially now that 67% of Indians live in urban or suburban areas.

In closing, I want to say to the Members of both Committees that after years of hard work and countless hours of meetings and hearings, the time has come for the Tribes, Congress, and the Administration to roll up our sleeves and do what we need to do with this bill to get the Act reauthorized

this year. If we do this, we can help to improve the health of Indian people and Indian communities and lay the groundwork for better health care for years to come.

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