

**Statement of Ben Nighthorse Campbell
Hearing on Draft Legislation to Reauthorize the
Indian Health Care Improvement Act of 1976**

March 8, 2000

Good afternoon. The Committee will come to order. Today will begin a series of hearings on draft legislation to reauthorize the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, the cornerstone of Indian health programs.

The programs operated by the Indian Health Service are vital to the health of American Indians and Alaska Natives. The IHS serves 1.3 million Native people and without these programs, the vast majority of Indian people would be without any health care whatsoever.

As we have heard all-too-often, Natives suffer the worst health status of any racial or ethnic group in America with a diabetes rate that is 3 times greater than the general population, and a death rate 4.3 times greater than the general population from complications of diabetes.

Diabetes in Native children is on the rise and the IHS reports that "there is clear evidence that for Indian people the health disparity related to diabetes is increasing."

Natives also suffer rates of heart disease 2 times as high as the general population, cancer and alcoholism 6 times the U.S. rate, hepatitis 2 times as high as the general population, and tuberculosis at 5 times as high as the general population.

The Indian Health Care Improvement or the "Act", was first passed in 1976 and has been reauthorized four times. The purpose of the Act is to address and minimize the health disparities among Native people and to provide a coherent authorization for health programs.

To lay the groundwork for this draft legislation, tribal leaders, health experts and the IHS formed a Steering Committee to make the IHS more flexible and responsive to the needs of Indian people. The draft bill before us is the result of the efforts of the Steering Committee and it includes provisions related to health services, health facilities, urban Indians, alcohol and drug abuse, diabetes and other matters.

I would like to submit my formal statement for the Record.