

**Prepared Statement of Ben Nighthorse Campbell
Vice Chairman - Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
Oversight Hearing on Problems Facing Native American Youth
August 1, 2002**

Good afternoon and welcome to the Committee's hearing on the many problems faced by Native youngsters today.

I want to thank our Chairman, Senator Inouye, for allowing me to schedule and chair this hearing because it is important.

A number of weeks ago the Committee convened a hearing on the condition and circumstances of Native elders and I remarked that we often get caught up in the furor of the day and the high profile like trust funds reform; housing and education; and gaming.

As a Committee and as a nation we have to step back and take stock of the things that are important and are worth talking about and fighting for.

Elder health is one of those issues.

Making sure Indian kids get the chances they can to improve themselves, their tribe and their country is also one of those issues.

Many people don't know a lot about my background but I was what you'd call a "troubled youngster". In my day, I was called a "juvenile delinquent" which is a fancy way of saying I had a lot of problems.

Indian youngsters today face many of the same problems I did when I was their age: family alcohol and substance abuse, jobless reservations, and all-too-often a hopelessness that many feel but few can escape.

There are also new problems facing Indian youth: gangs reign supreme where tribe and family once ruled; like all American kids, they are not getting enough exercise and are become obese. For a population that suffers from diabetes the way we do, obesity is the alarm bell that should prompt us to act.

Though there are always Federal responses to the problems we face in America, in my mind these responses are not always effective.

I believe that much of the responsibility for effectively answering these problems lies with the parents and families of Indian America; with the private and non-profit world, and last but certainly not least, with the individuals involved.

The decisions we make as young people can determine how we live the rest of our lives. These decisions also determine whether we'll have a life to live.

I want to thank the witnesses for their excellent testimony and just say how much I look forward to hearing from them.

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