

**OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASE
CROW TRIBAL LEGISLATURE**

**CROW LEGISLATURE PASSES TRIBAL RESOLUTION CALLING FOR
MONTANA'S CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION TO INVESTIGATE BILLINGS
AREA OFFICE OF THE INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE**

April 18, 2014

Crow Agency, Montana –

Yesterday, the Crow Tribal Legislature enacted a tribal resolution which declared it is “essential and in the best interests of the Crow Tribe to ensure a fully functional Indian Health Service on the Crow Reservation which meets the standards set out by federal law and treaty until such time as the Tribe may fully contract and assume the delivery of healthcare to its membership” and therefore calls for Montana’s Congressional Delegation to “take all necessary and proper measures to investigate the Billings Area Office of the Indian Health Service.”

The measure, introduced by Senator Eric Birdinground of the Center Lodge District, was a legislative resolution brought to the floor on the final day of the April quarterly session and passed with a 16-0 vote in favor.

Legislature Involves Crow Treaty Right to Healthcare, Other Federal Laws

The Resolution referenced Articles 3 and 10 of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty between the United States of America and the Crow Tribe of Indians, which contains language which guarantees that a physician shall be furnished and paid for by the federal government. Congress passed a Concurrent Resolution in 1988 recognizing such treaty rights and which “acknowledges and reaffirms the trust responsibility and obligation of the United States Government to Indian tribe for their preservation, protection, and enhancement, including the provision of health, education, social, and economic assistance programs.”

The Resolution also cited the 1976 Indian Health Care Improvement Act, in which Congress proclaimed it would be a “major national goal of the United States” to eradicate the health disparities between Indians and the general population of the United States by ensuring delivery of the quantity and quality of health services needed to raise Indian health to the highest possible level and to encourage the maximum participation of Indians in the planning and management of those services.

The 1976 Act recognized that the unmet health needs of the American Indian people were severe and the health status of the Indians is far below that of the general population of the United States. Subsequent amendments to the 1976 Act, including the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, have restated these policy goals, which specifically includes furthering the

requirement that the United States and Indian tribes shall work in a government-to-government relationship to ensure quality health care for all tribal members.

Resolution Cites 2010 Senate Investigation into Aberdeen Area Office

The Resolution invoked the investigation conducted by the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, chaired by former U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan of North Dakota, into the Aberdeen Area Office of the Indian Health Service after years of complaints concerning inadequate health care and administrative mismanagement. Six months after launching the Congressional investigation, a report titled "Critical Condition: The Urgent Need to Reform the Indian Health Service's Aberdeen Area Office" was released and identified many failures by the agency to meet legal and policy standards and, in short, was characterized in the report as operating in "a chronic state of crisis" and in need of serious and immediate reform.

The Resolution recognizes that Montana U.S. Senator Jon Tester now chairs the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, that Montana U.S. Senator John Walsh has shown interest in issues facing Montana's tribes, and that Montana U.S. House Representative Steve Daines serves on the House Subcommittee on Indian and Alaskan Native Affairs; and

Indian Health Service under Major Scrutiny from Crow Tribe

The Indian Health Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, operates a hospital in Crow Agency and health clinics in Lodge Grass and Pryor from the Billings Area Office, one of twelve regional offices of the agency. Hundreds of complaints from tribal members have been made to tribal officials, including the Crow Tribal Health Board, for the past several years which have increased recently and which range from no services, poor services, or extraordinary delay in receiving service. The Crow Tribal Health Board, which was established in 2010, along with the Executive Branch officials in concert with the Legislature, have recently increased efforts to provide meaningful oversight from the Crow Tribe in order to address these problems. The Resolution states that it is "vital that the representatives of the Crow Tribe in the Congress ensure that all problems are investigated, identified, and a corrective plan of action immediately implemented."

Congressman Daines Has Indicated Interest in Pursuing a Congressional Inquiry

Montana's U.S. House Representative, Steve Daines, met with the Crow Legislature on Friday, April 11th and was informed of the possibility of an upcoming tribal resolution which would call upon him to investigate the Indian Health Service. Congressman Daines expressed frustration with the idea that the federal agency is denying health coverage to Indians as a result of mismanagement and bureaucratic inefficiency. Congressman Daines informed the Legislature that he would welcome the request and find out what needs to be done in order to ensure proper efforts are made in response to the request.

For more information, please contact the Crow Tribal Legislature at (406) 638-2023. ####