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June 12, 2009

GENERAL MEMORANDUM 09-078

Indian Health Care Improvement Act Reauthorization Legislation Introduced in House of Representatives

On June 4, 2009, Representative Pallone (D-NJ), Chairman of the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health, introduced HR 2708, legislation to amend and reauthorize the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA).

The bill was referred to the Natural Resources Committee which has primary jurisdiction over the IHCIA. That Committee has scheduled a hearing for June 25 at which the Indian Health Service (IHS) and tribal witnesses will be invited to testify. The hearing will be webcast live at 10 a.m. Eastern time on the Committee's website: <http://resourcescommittee.house.gov>. The bill will subsequently be referred to Energy & Commerce and Ways & Means for consideration of provisions within the jurisdiction of those committees.

Original co-sponsors of the bill are Representatives: Baca (D-CA); Bordallo (D-G); Grijalva (D-AZ); Inslee (D-WA); Kildee (D-MI); McCollum (D-MN); Salazar (D-CO); Schauer (D-MI); Young (R-AK); Bono Mack (R-CA); Boren (D-OK); Heinrich (D-NM); Kagen (D-WI); Lujan (D-NM); Rahall (D-WV); Linda Sanchez (D-CA); and Teague (D-NM).

HR 2708 closely resembles the reauthorization bills considered by the House and Senate in the 110th Congress. The new bill reflects many updates requested by the National Tribal Steering Committee (NSC) which has spearheaded IHCIA bill advocacy for the past decade. At the request of Congressional leaders, the NSC revisited provisions that had been dropped over the years due to objections raised by the Bush Administration; several of these provisions were recommended for restoration.

Senate activity. An IHCIA reauthorization bill has not yet been introduced in the Senate. Early next week, however, Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Chairman Dorgan is expected to release a "concept paper" setting out his ideas for improvements in the Indian health system; this will likely include some provisions from the IHCIA reauthorization effort as well as other ideas for IHS program changes. We understand that Chairman Dorgan will seek views from Indian Country on a short time-schedule, as he may want to have concept paper entries considered by Congress as part of the national health care reform effort. On June 11 the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs held a hearing on reforming the Indian health care system – testimony from that hearing may be viewed on the Committee's web site: <http://indian.senate.gov>.

National Health Care Reform. From an Indian Country perspective, the IHCIA reauthorization effort has become intertwined with the push to enact sweeping national health care reform legislation this year. Tribal leaders and Indian health advocates have urged Congress to attach several provisions from the IHCIA bills to the national reform

legislation currently being drafted on a fast-track schedule in both the Senate and House. President Obama has given a very high priority to health reform legislation and is urging Congress to have a bill on his desk by October. Tribal leaders have urged that Indian-specific policies be reflected in the health reform legislation in order to protect and strengthen the Indian health care delivery system.

Please let us know if we may provide additional information regarding the IHCIA and health care reform efforts.

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