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**Red Lake Members Submit Written Testimony to U.S. House Appropriation Subcommittee in Conjunction with Native American Public Witness Days**

*Testimony Focuses on Solutions To Health Care Inequities on the Red Lake Reservation*

**(Bemidji, MN) March 26, 2009** – On Thursday, members of the Red Lake Nation released written testimony to the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies addressing a range of deficiencies and potential remedies for reforming health care delivery on the Red Lake Nation. The testimony, developed by members of the Four Eagles, a grassroots community organization, Project Safe Neighborhood, Red Lake Political Education Committee (PEC) in partnership with the statewide progressive advocacy organization TakeAction Minnesota, was released in tandem the Subcommittee’s Native American Public Witness Days held on March 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>.

In Washington, the House Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies held the two “Native American Public Witness Days” to focus on the needs of Native populations. Congress is in the process of approving President Obama’s budget this week, which includes \$634 billion for overhauling health care, and a \$700 million increase for IHS, the largest increase in funding the past twenty years.

On a conference call with local press, Red Lake PEC and TakeAction Minnesota described the deficient health care situation on the Red Lake reservation. Red Lake PEC co-chair Michelle Paquin-Johnson said that “funding for Indian Health Services has never been sufficient and isn’t meeting the needs of our tribal community.” She continued by discussing some of the critical needs of tribal members, including better access to doctors and dentists, quality of care issues, mis-categorization of health care needs, and the difficulty of reporting complaints about medical mistakes. Paquin-Johnson emphasized that “leaving solutions up to individual patients to follow through with isn’t right. We have to find a way to fix the complaint process and hold IHS accountable.”

Over the past few months, Red Lake PEC and TakeAction Minnesota have held two public listening sessions with members of the Red Lake Nation, to uncover core health care issues that most need to be addressed through federal reform. The solutions developed during these meetings became the core recommendations the Red Lake PEC made to Congress.

Embodied in the testimony were six key areas where real progress could be made in improving health outcomes for Red Lake members. These include:

- Recruiting and retaining a greater number of culturally competent doctors and dentists that will provide services locally.
- Increasing transparency in health services by ensuring that data on health outcomes are collected and made available to members of the tribe.
- Improving pharmaceutical services overall including consistent access to appropriate drugs in a timely & convenient way, as well as more tribal input on what kinds of drugs are available
- Ensuring that when medical errors and misdiagnoses occur they are acknowledged and that measures are put in place to prevent their happening again.
- Increasing the availability and effectiveness of a wide range of preventative services.
- Improving overall accountability between providers, patients, and the Tribe.

Dan McGrath, Executive Director of TakeAction Minnesota spoke of the relationship between the Red Lake PEC and his organization saying “A lot of people around the state feel helpless and disempowered about fixing the health care system. TakeAction Minnesota, in its work with the Health Care for America Now! (HCAN) campaign, is committed to keeping the spotlight focused on improving health care outcomes for everyone, including Minnesota’s Native American communities. It’s a critical part of the health care discussion that isn’t included enough.” TakeAction Minnesota is working in partnership with diverse organizations around the state of Minnesota in building a grassroots movement for health care reform

Paquin-Johnson said that she hopes Congress will take the recommendations about funding and health inequities seriously throughout the federal debate over health care reform this year. Together with TakeAction Minnesota, Red Lake members will work to educate Minnesota’s congressional delegation – especially Representative Collin Peterson – about the state of health care needs on the Red Lake reservation.

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