

Whew! Talk about hitting the ground running!



**CATHY ABRAMSON, DIRECTOR,
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During the week of July 23-27, I, along with our Legislative Director Mike McCoy, attended a number of meetings in Washington, D.C. There was a face-to-face meeting with the Medicare, Medicaid and Health Reform Policy Committee (MMPC). The purpose was to review and provide more detailed discussions of 2012 MMPC action plan priorities and assignments. The outcomes of this meeting was 1) continued work on the Affordable Care Act and the Indian Health Care Improvement Act health policy issues, regulation review and

development of draft positions with the greatest opportunities and highest priority for the Indian health system; and 2) reviewed strategies and process for advancing issues, identified tasks and timeframes and prepared for the Tribal Technical Advisory Group to meet with Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services top administration.

I attended and participated in the Health and Human Services Tribal Consultation on the Federally Facilitated Exchange. (These “exchanges” are new health insurance markets specified in Affordable Care Act.) At this time, tribal leaders gave input to the top administrators of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Consultation with tribes on the development of exchanges continues to be inconsistent across the country. In a few states, tribes have been brought on as meaningful participants in the development of exchanges. However, in many more states, including Michigan, tribes do not have a seat at the table and are not being consulted with.

Congress intended for health reform to be used as an additional means to help meet the

United States’ trust responsibility to provide health care to American Indians and Alaska Natives. If tribes are not allowed to meaningfully participate in the development of these programs at the state level, it is unlikely that tribes and their members will be able to reap the benefits they are designed to provide.

As chair of the National Indian Health Board, I was invited and attended the tribal leaders meeting with the Senate Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee. The meeting was chaired by Sen. Harry Reid with Senators Akaka, Bequick, Coons, Tester, Udall, Blumenthal, Murray, Stabenaw, Kroboclaw and Merkley. They were interested in getting input from various tribal leaders in the areas of education, the environment and economic development. Some of the topics brought up were: renewable and clean energy, tribal tax parity, Native American Global Trade Center-increased support for investments-domestic and foreign; and protection and preservation of the Great Lakes.

We also met with Senator Debbie Stabenow. Topics of discussion were the Special Diabetes Program for Indians, the Farm

Bill and request for recurring base funding for the Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority to support tribal natural resource management. Senator Stabenow has been a good friend to Indian Country and supports us and will push for us in our areas of concern.

I attended the tribal board orientation session and retreat on Sugar Island. This was excellent! We hadn’t had one in a long time. Our various program directors presented the services that they provide. I believe our new board members were impressed at the wide arrange of deliverable services that our tribal programs provide. Our program directors were also able to give input on their areas of concern. Our planning and development department, communications, budget and cultural staff were there to observe and take notes on how we can make improvements within and without our tribal organization. I am very proud of our staff. We have many talented individuals who really care about the future of our tribe. I feel confident that with the use of synergy and greatly improved communications, we will build a better organization that will, in turn, better serve our people.

Our tribal board also had time to ourselves to discuss how we could better work together to get things done on behalf of our tribal people and organization. This is just a start! We, as a board, have much more work to do together. At this time, I am very optimistic. I have been waiting for this opportunity for many years now. Of course, things will not happen overnight and I would appreciate your patience and understanding.

It was great to see everyone at the various gatherings, especially the Sugar Island powwow, which happens to be my most favorite! A lot of work goes into these events and I would like to thank all those individuals who worked so hard to bring these gatherings into fruition. These gatherings help bring our people together to celebrate our ways of life.

This report serves as a snapshot of meetings and events that I attend as your representative. If you would like more detailed information or have any questions or concerns, please contact me at my cell phone, (906) 322-3823, or at cabramson@saulttribe.net or on Facebook under Cathy Abramson.

Take care and I look forward to hearing from you!