

Native Americans make a difference, vote this November!



**CATHY ABRAMSON, DIRECTOR,
UNIT I**

Before I begin reporting my board activities, I want to stress how important it is for you to vote in this upcoming election. While we may be a small percentage of the overall population, Native Americans can make a difference in an election. Did you know that two out of every five eligible American Indian and Alaska Native voters are not registered to vote and, in 2008, over a million eligible Native voters were unregistered? Imagine the impact we could have on elections all across the country if our people registered and voted! In our states and districts, we have a perfect opportunity to make sure many more elected office holders know that Indian Country matters. Please get out and vote!

Also, at this time, I am asking you to vote for Gary McDowell for Congress. Gary is a friend of our tribe and Indian Country. We need him in D.C.! He knows our issues and concerns. He understands and supports the federal government's trust responsibility

to our Native nations. We have lost a lot of support in D.C. in the last few years. Please get out and vote! When you do, make sure you vote for Gary McDowell for Congress. We must do our part and vote him in to office so that he may help meet our needs and help keep the federal government's promises to us.

On Aug. 30, I provided tribal consultation testimony to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention. The CDC needs to reaffirm its commitment to establishing a government-to-government relationship with tribal government by committing funding to assist in the development of tribal and public health infrastructure, capacity and programs.

It is important that funding go directly to the tribes and funding be increased. The federal government's promise to provide healthcare was made a long time ago. Our treaties did not say that Indian Health Service (IHS) would provide healthcare to our tribes. It said the "federal government" would. The federal government is made up of various agencies, not just IHS. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is another agency that is obligated to serve our people.

In late 2010, the Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius created the Secretary's Tribal Advisory Committee (STAC), the first tribal advisory committee established to directly advise the secretary in the history of HHS. The committee is comprised of one primary representative for each of the 12 IHS service areas, as well as

five at-large national representatives. I am pleased to be one of those members, representing the Bemidji Area (Michigan, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin). The STAC's primary purpose is to seek consensus, exchange views, share information and provide advice or recommendations; or facilitate any other interaction related to intergovernmental responsibilities or administration of HHS programs.

On Sept. 11-12, I attended the STAC meeting in Washington, D.C. We informed the secretary of HHS that tribes need to get equal footing to funding. The Secretary needs to know our priorities so that we may increase our outreach and technical assistance. There are millions of dollars in countless programs under the Department of Health and Human Services, not only Indian Health Services.

We informed the secretary that 1) the STAC needs to continue on a permanent basis; 2) Our concerns with contract support costs; 3) Importance of the completion of a matrix where all the legislative barriers are in accessing state grants and programs; 4) It is imperative that the federal travel restrictions of only meeting at federal buildings not apply to tribes. It is important that we have federal-tribal meetings on Indian land so that staff may have a better chance to learn of who we are as a people by seeing where we live; 5) We stressed the importance of the Special Diabetes Program for Indians report to Congress be completed and sent to Congress as soon as possible. (Last week, it was

announced that it was delivered to Congress.); 6) Concerns regarding the Indian Child Welfare Act.

While I was there, I met with Central Office staff and our Project Specialist W.J. Strickland, from the Office of Head Start for American Indians and Alaska Natives. We discussed more effective ways of communications and consultations with our tribes. I am happy that I am able to meet directly with the people that are in charge of our Head Start programs and funding. I will continue to do so on a regular basis.

I recently attended the NIH's annual consumer conference in Denver, Colo. National Indian Health Board advocates on behalf of all federally-recognized tribal governments, American Indian and Alaska Natives. Elevating the visibility of Indian health care issues is NIH's mission. For 40 years, NIH has continually played a role in focusing the national attention of Indian health care needs. As the NIH chairperson, I worked morning until night in an effort to meet with the various health experts and tribal leaders across the country to see how we could advocate the importance of better health care delivery for Indian Country

Some of the tracks that were covered were as follows: veterans affairs, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, public health and health information technology. There were also workshops on the Affordable Care Act, data, diabetes, mental health and wellness and their impact in Indian Country to name a few.

Eric Shinseki, secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans

Affairs, was a keynote speaker. Our very own Dr. Mary Beth Skupien, also in attendance, informed us of all that the Veteran Affairs is providing for us in Indian Country. I am just so proud of her and all that she has done for our people!

Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, director of the Indian Health Service, was another keynote speaker. I was able to spend a lot of time with her to discuss our health care issues and concerns.

Following the passage of the Budget Control Act of 2011 and the failure of the Congressional "Super Committee," federal budget sequestration is becoming increasingly likely. During sequestration, agencies will experience significant mandatory cuts (8.2 percent) to their discretionary operating budgets. These cuts will have serious effects on the ability and obligation of agencies to uphold their trust responsibility to our people. It will be important that all tribal leaders get involved in the budget process and attend their area budget formulation meetings. It is important that all tribes give input to the distribution formula. In the meantime, we need to share our success stories about our local programs. We need to inform Congress how these cuts would hurt the services to our people. It is only Congress that can address this and correct it. We all need to work together to balance the budget.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (906) 322-3823 or e-mail me at cabramson@saulttribe.net.