

Abramson visits with members of Congress



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DIRECTOR, UNIT I**

On Feb. 3, I along with other Tribal Leaders Diabetes Committee members visited members of Congress or their staff to support the SDPI. We met with Congressman Pearce, Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler, and Congressman Lejan. We also met with staff of Congressman Tom Cole, Doug LaMalfa, Andrew Nyhus, and Congresswoman Kristi Noem. Earlier in the day I met with Senator Deb Stabenow who has been a champion for the SDPI. We continue to ask for multiyear funding. The diabetes program works and lives are being saved. I would like to thank Jenni O'Dell of the tribe's diabetes program for gathering the individual member's stories we were able to add to the congressional packet. Also, I'd like to congratulate Ms. Michelle Castagne, a tribal intern who was hired at the National Indian Health Board. Michelle is actively involved with scheduling, contacting and educating Congress in regards to SPDI. I am already hearing rave reviews about her



U.S. Senator Deb Stabenow and Unit I Rep. Cathy Abramson

and I'm so proud she is working there for all of Indian Country.

Please contact your congressman to show support for this very important program.

On Feb. 4-5, I attended the Tribal Leaders Diabetes Committee meeting in Rockville, Md. I am the Bemidji area representative on the committee. In reviewing the 2015 national tribal consultation, I quickly learned that not one tribe from the Bemidji area answered the tribal leader letter Dr. Roubideaux sent several months ago regarding the Special Diabetes Program for Indians. I was deeply disappointed that our own tribe did not answer this letter. This was the opportunity for us to give input on diabetes funding that we receive! Dr. Roubideaux did give us an extended time to answer. I have presented this information to the tribal leaders at the HHS regional consultation and the Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes (MAST). I hope we can answer those questions. Changes are being made with this program. The Bemidji area stands to lose at least 16 percent of funding! That would do some serious harm to the diabetes services to our people.

On Feb. 18 and 19, I represented our tribe at the Health and Human Services (HHS)/MAST Region V (Bemidji area) tribal consultation. At that time, I met with HHS officials to discuss tribes' specific concerns. Those in attendance represented the Office of the Secretary's Regional Director, Administration for Children and Families, Administration for Community Living, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services administrator. Also in attendance was Lorna Elliott-Egan, Michigan Department of Community Health's tribal liaison.

One of the big issues that greatly affects our tribe is the delay of NOA for continuation funding for grants that are beyond one year in length. This has been problematic for our tribe. For example, if the multi-year grant ends for year one on Aug. 30, the new notice of award is not received for months. Because of the lack of trust our

tribe has with the federal government, the services are closed down and staff members are laid off until the official award letter is received. This has happened in our tribe. It happened with our Traditional Foods Program. This hurts the delivery of services to our people and we have lost great staff who provide health care services to our people. While I believe our tribe could be more supportive in continuing these services, at the federal level the recommendation I brought was that prior to the last days of the previous award, notification of awards should be sent out.

Another issue our tribe faces is provider recruitment and retention. Pharmacists, medical providers and dentists are the key positions that need easier access to loan repayment funding and recruitment funding on a national level to assist in market-based studies to compete with the local health care organizations for retention and recruitment effort.

Another issue is that tribes need to be funded directly from the federal agencies for emergency preparedness and Homeland Security. Right now, we have to rely on getting that funding through the state. States are notorious for giving tribes very little funding to work with.

Other issues brought forward were our lack of funding for our Child Care Development Fund, Family Violence Prevention and Services and LIHEAP.

I met with Lorna Elliott-Egan, Michigan Department of Community Health tribal Liaison and we will be setting up some meetings in regards to our state funding issues. It is my hope that other tribal board members will join me.

It is very exciting to be working with the Office of HIRSA. They have agreed to a grant-writing training for the Bemidji area. Sault Tribe will be hosting this very needed and worthwhile training at the end of May. More information will be sent out as planning is completed.

On Feb. 9 in Atlanta, Ga., I attended the Tribal Public Health Workgroup. At this time we got a CDC budget update from top-level staff for state, tribal, local and territorial support: CDC chief financial officer and director of



Tribal public health workgroup Feb. 9 in Atlanta, Ga.

CDC's appropriations, Legislation and Formulation Office and the director and budget officer of CDC's Office of Budget. We also had a presentation from the associate director of science from CDC's National Center for Health Statistics. This is where we have a caucus with our technical advisors to meet and bring up issues we may bring forward to the CDC-TAC meeting and tribal consultation. CSC funded the National Indian Health Board so they could hire technical advisors to work with the committee. This has made our meetings more positive, encouraging, informative and meaningful. I have worked on this committee for a number of years and I can honestly say the CDC was the toughest nut to crack. Because CDC mostly employees scientists that really had no knowledge (or for some, no concern) for their trust responsibilities to our tribes. We were having a hard time communicating and working together. I'm happy to say, with that hard work and the breaking down of barriers, we have developed an excellent working relationship.

On Feb. 10, 11 and 12, I attended the CDC ATSDR Tribal Advisory Committee meeting at the CDC headquarters. At this time, we were able to hear presentations regarding chronic disease prevention and health promotion in Indian Country in regards to current initiatives and future directions. Also discussed were CDC efforts in suicide prevention. Hepatitis C is also a growing concern in Indian Country. We have a very supportive top-level staff beginning with Dr. Ileana Aris, principal deputy director, CDC/ATSDR. She is second-in-com-

mand with Dr. Tom Freden who is overall in charge of the CDC. Dr. Judith Monroe, deputy director, CDC/OSLTS and Dr. Ursula Bauer, director of National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion of CDC complete that strong support for Indian Country. This is where our tribe received two major funding awards that will help our people improve their lives. It is imperative that our tribal leaders get involved on these advisory committees so we are well informed of what initiatives are coming up. To hear from other tribes from other regions what is happening in their regions and to build those relationships with tribe and the federal agencies that fund us.

A big issue for all tribes is that funding goes to the state and in turn our tribes receive little or nothing. Makes no mistake, these federal agencies are hearing this loud and clear and are working with us so that we either get direct funding or encourage the state to work with us.

Top environmental administrative staff have agreed to a teleconference with our tribal leaders regarding environmental issues our tribe faces. They will also visit. The Mackinac pipeline should be a priority discussion.

I have been busy working for you and for ways to get our tribe more funding. I believe the relationship building has been very successful. I look forward to more improved services and funding sources.

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions or comments please contact me at (906) 322-5823 or cabramson@saulttribe.net. I look forward to hearing from you.