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July 15, 2005

The Honorable John McCain
Chair
Committee on Indian Affairs
United States Senate
836 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Enzi
Chair
Committee on Health Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman McCain and Chairman Enzi:

I am writing to express the support of the American Bar Association (ABA) for the reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCA). Recognizing the United States' continuing obligation to provide adequate health care to American Indians and Alaska Natives, the ABA adopted policy in February 2004 urging Congress to reauthorize the Act.

Notwithstanding the progress that has been made since the founding of the Indian Health Service, American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to experience dramatic health disparities and high mortality rates compared to the rest of the American population. For instance, the mortality rate from diabetes for American Indians and Alaska Natives is 420 percent higher than that for the general population; from accidents, 280 percent; from suicide, 190 percent; and from alcoholism, 770 percent higher.

Congressional action is critical because IHCA has not been reauthorized since 1992. In 2000, the Act's authorizing provisions for federal funding and specific IHS programs expired. Congress extended the Act's funding authority through 2001, but since then has relied upon the Snyder Act to justify federal funding for Indian health care programs. Reauthorization of IHCA would authorize funding for programs more targeted to the needs of the Native American community and more specifically

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geared to bringing Indian health care into parity with that provided to the majority of other Americans.

Enactment this Congress of reauthorizing legislation, such as S.1057, is an important first step to improving the quality of health care for Native Americans and Alaska Natives. We urge that the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee support timely and expeditious reauthorization of IHCA.

Thank you for considering the views of the ABA on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert D. Evans".

Robert D. Evans

cc: The Honorable Byron Dorgan
The Honorable Ted Kennedy
The Honorable Richard Pombo
The Honorable Nick Rahall