

Nevada is home to almost 20,000 Native Americans, many of whom are Paiute, Shoshone, and Washoe. Nevada's Native Americans make valuable contributions to the state's economy and culture, and I am committed to protecting the self-determination of tribal governments in their pursuit of growth and prosperity for their members. As a senior member of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, I have worked to address the needs of Nevada's Native American families, particularly in the areas of health services, housing, welfare reform, and education.

Strengthening Self-Determination

Federal Indian policy should respect tribal self-determination and should be sensitive to the cultural heritage and religious traditions of Native American communities. Last year, I led a successful bipartisan effort to preserve ancestral lands of the Washoe Indian Tribe. The legislation transferred 24 acres at Lake Tahoe from the Secretary of Agriculture to the Secretary of the Interior to be held in trust for the Washoe Tribe and protected from development. Almost 150 years after the Washoe people were forcibly removed from Lake Tahoe, this legislation restores to the Tribe a place that is central to their existence and to which they have essential cultural connections.

Native Americans have long maintained a special government-to-government relationship with the United States. This relationship has served Indian Country well and should not only be protected but expanded to Native Hawaiians. That is why I strongly support Senator Daniel Akaka's legislation to establish a process for federal recognition of the Native Hawaiian governing entity.

Improving Health Care and Education

We must improve health care, education, and other governmental services on reservations. Too often, health care and educational initiatives for Indian Country lack the funding and planning to make a substantial impact in communities. As a senior member of the Indian Affairs and Appropriations Committees, I am working to ensure high-quality health care and educational services for all Native Americans.

I am pleased that Congress has increased funding for the Indian Health Services in recent years, but more needs to be done. That is why I have supported legislation to elevate the position of Director of the Indian Health Service within the Department of Health and Human Services to the Assistant Secretary level. Doing so would strengthen advocacy for the development of Indian health policy and promote consultation on matters related to Indian health.

As someone whose life was transformed by education, I appreciate the importance of increasing investments in schools throughout Indian Country. I have supported legislation to provide for the construction and rehabilitation of tribal schools because students need good learning environments to reach their full potential. It is also important to bolster higher education in Indian Country, which is why I have advocated for the creation of a loan forgiveness program to help tribal colleges and universities attract and keep good teachers.

Western Shoshone Claims Distribution

I worked hard for the past three years to pass legislation to settle the long-standing claims of the Western Shoshone Indian Tribe. My bill, which was finally enacted July 7, 2004, will distribute over \$144 million to an estimated 6,000 eligible members. Future generations of Western Shoshone also will be able to enjoy the benefit of the distribution, which sets aside more than \$1.27 million in a tribally-controlled educational trust fund. Individual members of the Western Shoshone will be able to apply for grant money for education and other needs within limits set by a tribal-appointed committee. This legislation enjoyed the strong support of the Western Shoshone people and the entire Nevada congressional delegation. I remain committed to working with the Department of Interior and the Western Shoshone people to ensure that the distribution occurs in a fair and expeditious manner.

For more information visit my Web-Site at <http://reid.senate.gov>