

NCAI Update - August 1, 2001
(Broadcast #373)

NAHASDA Reauthorization Introduced in Senate– On July 20, Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-CO) introduced the Native American Housing and Self Determination Reauthorization Act of 2001. The act will reauthorize the 1996 NAHASDA bill that provides funding for housing projects, block grants, and training and technical assistance for housing, until the year 2006. The bill does not include any amendments or changes to the original bill, except for the extension of its programs and authority for the next five years. The bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for action. NCAI will work with the Senate Committee on the reauthorization of the bill.

ICWA Amendments Introduced in House – On July 25, Representative Don Young (R-AK) introduced the Indian Child Welfare Act Amendments of 2001. The amendments provide for changes in Jurisdiction of Tribal courts in custody and adoption proceedings, the way parents can voluntarily terminate parental rights, the notice to tribes of such termination, and the ability of tribes to intervene in custody and adoption cases proceeding in State courts. The amendments also provide for criminal sanctions for fraudulent representation, allows visitation rights for extended family and tribal members of a child, and provides for the placement of foster children in homes that reflect unique Native cultures. The amendments have been referred to the House Resources Committee, but have not yet been slated for action.

“Squaw” Bill to be Introduced – Congressman Denny Rehberg (R-MT) has drafted legislation that will instruct the Secretary of Interior to remove the word “squaw” from place names on land either partially or wholly administered by the federal government. The bill will require the Board on Geographic Names to identify all Federal place names with the word “squaw” and petition local communities for changes to the name. The Board will be given five years to undertake the task of permanently changing the name of the places. The bill does not apply to Indian lands. NCAI will update its membership when the bill is introduced.

Navajo Code Talkers Honored – On Thursday, July 26, the Congress of the United States honored the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers with Congressional Medals of Honor. At a one hour reception in the Rotunda of the Capitol, President Bush bestowed the medals upon four of the five living Marines who developed and used a code based on their native Diné language to prevent Japanese interceptions of highly sensitive military commands in World War II. The code was the only code never to have been cracked during the war, and its use saved the lives of thousands of soldiers and ensured the United States’ victory over Japan in the Pacific theatre.

John Brown Jr., Chester Nez, Lloyd Oliver, and Allen Dale June received the highest civilian honor Congress can award at the ceremony, while Joe Palmer, the fifth living Code Talker, was

represented at the event by his son. The remaining 24 gold medals were awarded to the families of the original Code Talkers who have since passed. 300 silver medals will be awarded to those Veterans from other tribes who created code based on their Native languages in later years.

The medals were authorized in legislation authored by Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM). Senator Bingaman said that the Code Talker's contributions were, "even more heroic given the cultural context in which they were operating. Experiencing alienation in their own homeland and discouraged from speaking their own language, they still stepped forward and developed the most significant and successful military code of the time." Senator Bingaman was joined in giving remarks by Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-CO) and Congressman Tom Udall (D-NM). House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL) presided over the ceremony. Several notables attended the event, including Navajo Nation President Kelsey Begay and Speaker Edward Begay. Indian actor Adam Beech was in attendance in promotion of his new movie *Windtalkers*, along with actors Nicolas Cage and Lisa Marie Presley. NCAI President Sue Masten was in attendance representing NCAI. NCAI extends our congratulations and our gratitude to the Code Talkers and their families.

For further information, contact NCAI at (202) 466-7767.

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