

Commission on Native Children – Quotes from National Supporters

“The Commission on Native Children, authorized in Senator Heitkamp’s legislation, is an important step in acknowledging the needs of Native American children and the gaps in resources to address those needs. Senator Heitkamp demonstrates a commitment to Native American children by introducing such a bill early in the Congress and it is incredible to see a significant group of bipartisan Senators join her in this commitment. Our government has made promises to Indian Country and I believe that our youngest First Americans should be a top priority. I am looking forward to working with Senator Heitkamp and the other co-sponsors through my work at the Center for Native American Youth, an organization I created when I retired from several decades in Congress. At CNAY, we are working to shine a light on and develop solutions to the unique challenges facing Native American youth, while celebrating success and promoting hope. Senator Heitkamp's legislation is a positive and welcome step in our collective efforts to improve the lives of Native American children.”

-- U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan (ret.), founder and chairman of Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute

“NCAI firmly believes that the Commission on Native Children is an important step in bringing the issues of our most precious resources -- Native children -- to the forefront. Indian Country’s success depends on our ability to support our youngest citizens and we applaud Senators Heitkamp and Murkowski for making Native youth a priority by reintroducing this legislation in the first days of the new Congress. For far too long, our country has overlooked the needs of Indian children, and this Commission will further the national conversation and take action on issues that will help Indian Country build a better future for Native children across the nation.”

-- National Congress of American Indians

“The National Indian Child Welfare Association is excited to support the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Act. As a national Native organization dedicated to American Indian and Alaska Native children, NICWA has long recognized that federal and state policies could do more to support the well-being and cultural connections of American Indian and Alaska Native children. NICWA welcomes this bill which would create space for a national dialogue about policy challenges American Indian and Alaska Native children face in the child welfare, juvenile justice, health, and educational systems. This bill will ensure that American Indian and Alaska Native children are able to grow up safe, healthy, and supported. We thank Senators Heitkamp and Murkowski, and all the co-sponsors who have since joined, for making Native children’s well-being a priority.”

-- National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)

“On behalf of the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) and the 566 Federally Recognized American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal Governments we serve, I write today to express my strong support for your legislation to establish the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children. As you know, American Indians and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children experience some of the highest rates of poverty and continue to experience some of the greatest health challenges in the country. This bill represents an important step in providing a better future for AI/AN children and for preserving our health and culture for the next seven generations. From youth suicide to childhood obesity to physical abuse and neglect, the issues

facing young people in Indian Country are grave. ... This legislation will be an important contributor to bringing light to these issues and breaking down some of the administrative and bureaucratic barriers we face when working to better the lives of our children.”

-- Lester Secareto, Chairperson, National Indian Health Board (NIHB)

“On behalf of Native students, educators, families, communities, and tribes, the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) is excited and appreciative Senator Heitkamp continues to put Native students, and their comprehensive needs, first. NIEA is glad to endorse the re-introduction of the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Act, which would begin to reverse the disparaging issues affecting children from our American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities. We appreciate the bill because it provides language to create a Commission focused on analyzing juvenile justice, health, educational wrap-around programs and falls in line with NIEA’s priorities for Native children. NIEA understands that our children must have access to the best support structures from birth through college, so that they may become the future leaders our communities need and deserve. Senator Heitkamp also understands the needs of Native children, and we are proud that she is working to provide such support for our Native children and communities.”

-- National Indian Education Association (NIEA)

“The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) is proud to support Senator Heitkamp as she re-introduces her bill that commits to delivering a better future for our Native children and our young people by creating a Commission on Native Children. Across the nation, AIHEC’s 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities are dedicated to the integral elements that advance wellness and a continuum of education – from child care centers and Head Start training, to graduating nurses and K-12 school teachers – through community-based institutions of higher education. We look forward to working with Senator Heitkamp in advancing these same goals of offering our Native children and students the solutions and educational opportunities they need to thrive. Together, we can pass meaningful legislation that initiates a Commission to make sure we are offering our Native children a healthy and dynamic outlook for years to come.”

--American Indian Higher Education Consortium