



National Indian Council on Aging

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SUBMITTED VIA FACSIMILE 202-224-6008

December 5, 2006

The Honorable Tom Coburn
US Senate
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Coburn,

The National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA) urges you to lift your hold on H.R. 4766, the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act of 2006, which would expand the current grants program at the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Native Americans. This amendment would help Native languages survive through training programs for teachers and parents and opportunities for children to increase their fluency.

NICOA joins with a wide circle of Tribes, national Indian organizations and faith-based groups that care about the rights and well being of American Indians and Alaska Natives and the importance of their cultural preservation. **Language preservation is a significant matter for our Elders because traditional languages often are intertwined with spiritual ceremonies and practices.** Our members are often the teachers of the language in Tribal programs, in ceremonies and the keepers of songs and traditions, which allows our Nations to thrive and continue. Accompanying this letter is the resolution supporting passage of H.R. 4766 adopted by the 1,830 American Indian and Alaska Native Elders who comprise our membership when they met in Tulsa, Oklahoma in September 2006.

An important part of cultural preservation is retention and revitalization of languages. As you know, ancient languages such as Gaelic or Hebrew are at the heart of a culture. Helping young people to reclaim or retain these languages is a challenge for many groups including American Indians and Alaska Natives. As National Congress of American Indians officer Juana Majel Dixon has said, "How we celebrate our traditions is based on the cultural expression of language and songs."

We commend you for working with the National Indian Education Association to address your concerns. Please assist in letting this legislation pass this week in Congress.

Sincerely,

Steve Wilson (Muscogee Creek Nation)
Chairman, Board of Directors

Traci L. McClellan (Cherokee Nation)
Executive Director