

Smith Advocates Education at Native American Forum

WASHINGTON – Sen. Gordon Smith (R-OR) recently praised current initiatives and offered his own ideas on Indian education policy during a speech to approximately 50 Native American leaders from across the country at the first annual Congressional Forum for Native American and Alaska Native Tribal Leaders and Tribal College Presidents in Washington, D.C.

“Innovative, sophisticated, and well-funded tribal education is an integral part of self-determination, self-sufficiency, and cultural preservation,” said Smith, a member of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. “Now is the time to begin making substantial improvements in Native American education and schools.”

The forum brought tribal leaders and government officials together to examine issues affecting the Native American community. Smith used the forum to discuss his ideas for improving tribal secondary and higher education, as well as propose the creation of a tribal college preparatory school for America’s most talented Indian students.

“Bringing the best and brightest Indian students together at one premier prep school would create a wealth of new opportunities for Native Americans,” said Smith. “The objective would not only be gaining admittance to America’s most prestigious universities, but also to have a place where the most promising Native American minds can exchange new ideas.”

Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools are responsible for educating approximately 50,000 Native American youths. President Bush’s budget includes provisions for extensive upgrades to deteriorating BIA school facilities.

Chemawa Indian School in Salem, Ore., is the oldest continuously operating BIA boarding school in the U.S. In his speech, Smith vowed to take a lead in trying to secure federal appropriations for BIA schools.

Editor’s note: Sen. Smith can be reached at 404 Russell Building, Washington, DC 20510-3704; 202-224-3753; 202-228-3997 (fax); Web form: <http://gsmith.senate.gov/webform.htm>.

More Kids Qualify for Free Health Coverage

In February, the 2004 Federal Poverty Guidelines were released by the federal government, increasing the amount a family can earn and still qualify for essential public services. Such services include free or reduced lunches for school children, food stamps, and public health care, among others.

Under the new guidelines, children in a family of four with a gross monthly income of \$2,906 (185 percent federal poverty level [FPL]), qualify for the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). This is a comprehensive public health care program with no premiums or co-pays. In 2003, the income level for a family of four was \$2,837.

National Initiative

“Covering Kids & Families is a national initiative, spearheaded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, with the primary goal of ensuring that eligible, uninsured children and

families are enrolled in Oregon’s public health care programs,” said Lori Ann Sheridan, State CKF director. “We have an office in Newport and Helpline volunteers throughout the country who can assist individuals who need help with completing their applications and understand eligibility requirements.”

Basic conditions for SCHIP coverage for children include a cap of \$5,000 in liquid assets (cash in the bank), a six-month un-insurance period, and family income is averaged over a four-month period. Enrollment is for six months at a time and re-enrollment is necessary to continue coverage.

The Family Health Insurance Assistance Program (FHIAP) also is available for workers (and their dependents) of employers who offer group insurance. Premium subsidies are available for working adults and their families with incomes less than 185 percent FPL.

Assistance can range up to 95 percent coverage of employee premiums.

OHSU Offers MedStars Program

High school students can explore medical careers through the MedStars Health Careers Honor Program at Oregon Health Sciences University.

The program runs July 14-17, 2004. **Application deadline is April 14, 2004.** The program costs \$200, but scholar-

ships are available for Native and Hispanic students.

Applications for the nine open spots can be obtained from DeAnna Pearl at 1-800-648-0449, ext. 1659, or 541-444-9659 or Veneza Tena at 541-737-8603 or Veneza.tena@oregonstate.edu.

Health Conference Seeks Students

The Association of American Indian Physicians is having a National Native American Youth Initiative Conference to motivate Native American students to remain in the academic pipeline and pursue a career in the health professions or biomedical research.

Native American high school students between the ages of 16 and 18 who plan to enter the health professions are eligible to apply. Students must have

a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0. **The deadline for submission is May 14.**

Students chosen for the conference will receive an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., on June 19-27, 2004.

For more details, contact DeAnna Pearl at 1-800-648-0449, ext. 1659, or 541-444-9659; or Veneza Tena, Oregon Pacific AHEC, at 541-737-8603 or online at www.aaip.com/student/nnayi.

Legal Aid Services Grant Helps Rural Oregonians

Legal Aid Services received a two-year Civil Legal Assistance to Rural Oregon grant to help survivors of sexual

assault, domestic violence, and stalking. It covers rural service areas of the tribe: Clackamas, Linn, Benton, Washington, Yamhill, Tillamook, and Lincoln counties.

We can help survivors with a variety of civil legal needs, not just protective orders. For instance, we can help with housing issues, divorce, custody, child support, public benefits, etc.

Definitions used by the grantor are very broad. For instance, domestic violence can include emotional abuse and intimidation. Some folks who can’t get a restraining order under Oregon or tribal law may still be able to get our help.

Call 1-800-222-3884 for more information. Even tribal members who live in a county not listed above are welcome to call for information about nearby resources that may be able to help.

Questions? Call Linda Gast at the Lincoln County office of Legal Aid Services of Oregon at 1-800-222-3884. Services will be provided by Lincoln County and other Legal Aid Services located by survivors.

The Lincoln County office will take the initial calls to get information, determine any deadlines, provide emergency safety planning, and then for further services from other offices.

Check It Out

The federal government has launched a single, comprehensive Web site that contains information about finding and applying for all federal grant programs – www.grants.gov.