

Violence Against Women Act closes loophole

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

When President Barack Obama re-authorized the 1994 Violence Against Women Act on Thursday, March 7, he closed a loophole and brought more protection to Native American women across the country.

"Indian Country has some of the highest rates of domestic abuse in America," Obama said moments before signing the bill. "And one of the reasons is that when Native American women are abused on Tribal lands by an attacker who is not Native American, the attacker is immune to prosecution by Tribal courts."

"Well, as soon as I sign this bill that ends. Tribal governments have an inherent right to protect their people, and all women deserve the right to live free from fear. And that is what today is all about."

According to the Department of Justice, nearly half of all Native American women have been raped, beaten or stalked by an intimate partner; one in three will be raped in their lifetime; and on some reservations, women are murdered at a rate 10 times higher than the national average.

Also according to the Department of Justice, 86 percent of rapes and sexual assaults against Native

American women are committed by non-Native American men.

Even more disturbing, the Government Accountability Office reported that between 2005 and 2009 that 67 percent of sexual abuse cases sent to the federal government for prosecution were declined.

The reauthorized version of VAWA gives Tribes sentencing authority — up to three years, which could mean that some severe cases still will be sent to federal or state authorities for prosecution. The new provisions also are geared toward targeting domestic or dating violence.

"Today represents a historic moment in the nation-to-nation relationships between Tribes and the federal government," said Jefferson Keel, president of the National Congress of American Indians. "Now that the Tribal provisions have been enacted and protection for all women re-authorized, justice can march forward. Local Tribal authorities have much work to do to ensure that our citizens are protected from these violent crimes."

"NCAI has already begun focusing on coordinating the implementation of VAWA. Today is a great day, because it marks the beginning of justice and the end of



Manuel Balce Ceneta/AP Photo

President Barack Obama greets Our Sister's Keeper Executive Director Diane Millich, left, and Tulalip Tribes of Washington state Vice Chairwoman Deborah Parker, center, after signing the Violence Against Women Act on Thursday, March 7, at the Interior Department in Washington, D.C. Attorney General Eric Holder, back left, watches.

injustice that has gone unanswered for too long."

In addition to programmatic support for Native survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, the act includes Tribal jurisdiction provisions authorizing Tribal governments to prosecute non-Indian defendants involved in intimate relationships with Native women and who assault these victims on

Tribal land.

Before enactment of the law, federal laws did not authorize Tribal law enforcement or Tribal courts to pursue any form of prosecution or justice against the non-Indian perpetrators.

The legislation finally passed through Congress in late February with a 286-138 vote in the House and 78-22 vote in the Senate. ■

Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Tribal Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program:

Wawa pus tenas
'Speaking for
Children/Youth'



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NATIVE CHILDREN

The Tribal Court is looking for committed, caring adults who have an interest in helping one of the nearly 90 Grand Ronde children currently in foster care by becoming a CASA volunteer. As a volunteer, you will be trained to help give children a voice during a difficult time by appearing at Court, attending meetings involving the child, and advocating for the child's best interest.

For more information or to apply, contact Adrea Korthase, Tribal Court Program Specialist at 503-879-4623 or email adrea.korthase@grandronde.org

If you would like more information on how to volunteer and better serve our Tribal Children, please detach and complete this form and return it to: Tribal Court Programs Specialist, 9615 Grand Ronde Road, Grand Ronde, Oregon 97147. For additional information, call 503-879-4623 or email adrea.korthase@grandronde.org



- ☐ please send me a CASA Advocate Application
☐ please send me more information about the Tribal Court CASA Program

Name: _____

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Recycle Center moved

The Recycle Center has been moved to 9675 Grand Ronde Road. For more information, contact the Tribal Facilities Manager at 503-879-2407. ■

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from all over and represent women in recovery, for women recovering from abuse of all
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