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Tester's Indian education legislation clears hurdle
Senator praises committee for passing THE PATH Act

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – Senator Jon Tester’s legislation to address three of the most pressing issues facing Indian Country today—health care, education and job creation—cleared a major hurdle today by passing the Senate Indian Affairs Committee.

Tester’s legislation, called THE PATH Act, authorizes federal grant money for the nation’s tribal colleges and universities to promote careers in Indian health care. The measure would:

- Create nursing and other health care education programs at tribal colleges.
- Help staff Indian clinics and community wellness centers.
- Allow tribal colleges to start community outreach programs to manage key concerns like diabetes, at-risk youth and substance abuse in Indian Country.

“THE PATH Act is about providing individuals with opportunity and native communities with new vitality,” said Tester, a member of the Indian Affairs Committee. “By training more Indian students to enter the health care field, we provide their communities with good jobs, educated and self-sufficient members. And at the same time, we also improve the quality and access to culturally appropriate healthcare.”

Tester wrote THE PATH (Through Higher Education, Promoting the Advancement of Tribal Health) Act after hosting a tribal college summit in Browning, Mont., last April.

During that summit, Tester met with representatives from all seven tribal colleges in Montana, tribal leaders, state leaders and Indian education leaders to brainstorm ways of improving Indian higher education in Montana, and across the country.

Expanding opportunities in health care education was a recurring theme during the summit.

“This is an exciting day for Indian Country,” said Montana Rep. Margaret Campbell of Poplar, Vice President of Community Services at Fort Peck Tribal College and a member of the Assiniboine Tribe. “Jon’s leadership is bringing new hope and opportunity to our communities. This legislation is the result of good teamwork, and it really gets to the heart of some of the most pressing issues we face.”

Montana Senator Max Baucus is a cosponsor of THE PATH Act.

“We have a tremendous responsibility to help our children build a brighter future for themselves and for our state,” said Baucus. “This bill is right for Montana’s Indian students, and it’s right for Montana. Educating these young people is an investment in economic development that will bring good paying jobs to every corner of our state.”

The Committee’s passage of THE PATH Act (S. 1779) is the first major step in the legislative process. The legislation now goes to the full Senate for consideration.

Contact: Patrick Devlin, (202) 224-2644
Aaron Murphy, (406) 252-0291