

[Former BoD President, Moke Eaglefeathers, passed away on 05/31/16](#)

Category: News

written by NCUIH | June 2, 2016

On May 31, 2016 Former NCUIH President, Melbert 'Moke' Eaglefeathers, passed away. Born on May 11, 1953. An enrolled member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. Resident of Butte, Montana.

A highly compassionate, spiritual and politically savvy urban Native American leader with an incessant passion to improve in a holistic manner the marginal stage of his communities, Mr. Eaglefeathers, "Moke", worked in a steady and clear manner to lay solid ground for authentic and permanent changes to happen.

Moke was a widely acknowledged leader in the urban Native community whose achievements were recognized by the Governor of Montana and Senator Tester (MT). For over a decade, he served as the Executive Director of the North American Indian Alliance (NAIA) in Butte, Montana (Big Sky Country). As NAIA's ED, Moke served multiple times as President and President Elect of the National Council of Urban Indian Health, NCUIH (over 7 years combined between 2006 and 2014).

Moke's' extraordinary ability to envision and conceptualize political strategies was critical and instrumental in the accomplishment of one of the primary goals in Indian country and mandates from NCUIH's Board of Directors. His role as the tribal liaison of the Council made it possible for the urban Indian community to create solid alliances yielding policy gains in the reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCA). With patience, wisdom and a calculated strategy, Moke embarked on a journey to visit, educate tribal leaders across Indian country on the importance of having health programs for all Native Americans in the cities. As NCUIH's emissary, he built consensus and managed to engage leaders to stay on a single supporting front to pass the Reauthorization of the IHCA as a component of the Health Care Reform. His quiet but steady leadership was backed up by Senators Tester and Dorgan during these critical years. Moke was that low key but firm and critical voice on the hill that helped achieve the cornerstone legal authority for the provision of health care to all American Indians and Alaska Natives in a time where many loud attempts were frequently frustrated by a lack of political will on the part of Congress and the Administration. IHCA was reauthorized in March 2010—a major breakthrough as it permanently secures health care for the American Indian and Alaska Native population and provides not only a road map for the U.S. government to fulfill its trust responsibility to Indian people, but also the right and ability for Urban Indian leaders to confer with the US Government.

Moke, as Board President, also lead the effort to [repel the elimination of the funding for the Urban Indian Health Programs](#) that served more than 100,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives with contracts and grants from the Indian Health Service (2006-2008- Proposed by the Bush Administration). His leadership and strategy helped NCUIH achieve yearly bi-partisan letters of support from the House and the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs supporting the appropriation of funds for the Urban Indian Health Program. Under his leadership, the Urban Indian Programs were able to not only overcome the proposed elimination of the budget but also accomplished the incredible task of increasing funding significantly to the programs by almost nine (9) million dollars representing an almost 30% increase in funding for all of the urban Indian Health Programs across the U.S..

In 2007, Moke supported NCUIH's national efforts for the US to endorse the United Nations'

Declaration on Indigenous Peoples Rights. Along with NCUIH Staff, Moke worked hard to educate and build consensus among Native American leaders on how important it was for the United States to join the rest of the world on recognizing and acknowledging that its Indigenous populations have and are fully entitled to preserve a different cosmology of their own. Moke supported for NCUIH to contact the US Department of State's Ambassador Rice in 2007 and [Secretary Clinton in 2009 recommending both to designate a permanent representative to the Forum and the endorsing of the UN Declaration of Indigenous Rights](#). Stemming from the latter, NCUIH was also granted observer status in the UN Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues and managed to educate other countries about the US Urban Indians via an [intervention in the general assembly by the representative from North America](#). Obama's Administration endorsed the Declaration for the first time in 2010.

During his last tenure as NCUIH President, [Moke urged members of Congress](#) from both parties to exempt urban American Indians and Alaska Natives from the impact harmful sequester cuts as well as for the US Government agencies to appropriately implement policies stemming from the Affordable Care Act to benefit Native Americans seeking health Services in Urban Indian Health Programs.