

PRESS RELEASE: NCUIH Presents Good Medicine Awards to Outgoing Legislators Tester and Peltola

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The “Good Medicine Award” recognizes exceptional leadership on behalf of Native communities in support of health care services.

WASHINGTON, D.C. (December 11, 2024)– On December 11, 2024, the National Council of Urban Indian Health presented two Good Medicine Awards to Members of Congress for their efforts to support the Indian Health Service and efforts to improve health outcomes for Native communities during their tenure in Congress. Senator Jon Tester (D-MT) and Representative Mary Sattler Peltola (D-AK) were recognized for their outstanding contributions and demonstrated leadership in advancing Native health care. Throughout their tenure in Congress, these individuals have gone above and beyond in their efforts to champion legislation, policies, and initiatives that promote the health, welfare, and rights of Native peoples, and have a proven track record of collaboration, bipartisan cooperation, and effectiveness in advancing legislative agendas that address critical issues relating to Native health.

NCUIH thanks Senator Tester and Representative Peltola for their proven dedication to upholding the federal trust and treaty obligation to provide healthcare services to all American Indian and Alaska Native people.



Senator Jon Tester

During his 18 years in the United States Senate, Senator Tester has become widely known as one of the strongest supporters of Indian Country on Capitol Hill. Over the past nearly two decades, Senator Tester has fought fiercely to protect the Indian Health Service through legislation and appropriations. In 2023, Senator Tester supported advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service, protecting funding for the IHS regardless of the current year appropriations status. In 2024, he joined 20 colleagues in sending [a letter](#) to Senate leadership requesting full funding for the Indian Health System, including Urban Indian Health. Senator Tester's consistent advocacy has protected access to culturally competent care for all American Indian and Alaska Native people. Senator Tester has also been a fierce advocate for Native veterans and ensuring their easy access to Veterans Affairs services. He supported the *Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act*, which greatly improved healthcare access for American Indian and Alaska Native veterans by providing Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) coverage for care that Native veterans receive from

Title V Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs). In 2021, Senator Tester also supported the improved [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the Indian Health Service and the VA. This has provided better access to culturally competent care and alleviated burdens on the VA system. In addition, Senator Tester was monumental in the [establishment](#) of a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Copay Exemption for Native Veterans, leading to the exemption and/or reimbursement of over 234,000 copayments. This has saved Native veterans more than \$4.1 million as of September 2024. Senator Tester has taken many actions throughout his career on behalf of American Indian and Alaska Native people and we are grateful for his service.



Representative Mary Sattler Peltola

Although Representative Peltola only had one full term in Congress, her positive impact on Indian Country will last for decades. As co-chair of the Native American Caucus, she championed issues

that upheld the Federal Trust Responsibility, including cosponsoring H.R. 7227, the *Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools Policies Act*. In May 2024, Representative Peltola also joined 51 of her colleagues in sending [a letter](#) to House Leadership requesting full funding for the Indian Health Service, including Urban Indian Health. The letter emphasized that the federal government has a trust responsibility to provide federal health services to maintain and improve the health of American Indian and Alaska Natives. Representative Peltola's support has ensured that the Indian Health Service will be able to continue providing care to all American Indian and Alaska Native people. Representative Peltola's fierce leadership, voice, and dedication to upholding the trust responsibility to all American Indian and Alaska Native people will truly be missed and remembered.

About NCUIH

Organizations contracting with the Indian Health Service under the *Indian Health Care Improvement Act*. NCUIH is devoted to the support and development of quality, accessible, and culturally competent health and public health services for American Indians and Alaska Natives living in urban areas.

NCUIH respects and supports Tribal sovereignty and the unique government-to-government relationship between our Tribal Nations and the United States. NCUIH works to support those federal laws, policies, and procedures that respect and uplift Tribal sovereignty and the government-to-government relationship. NCUIH does not support any federal law, policy, or procedure that infringes upon or in any way diminishes Tribal sovereignty or the government-to-government relationship.

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