

Indian Health Improvement Act

WASHINGTON — The Senate has passed and sent to the House of Representatives Senate Bill 2938, the Indian Health Care Improvement Act co-sponsored by U.S. Sen. Mike Gravel, D-Alaska.

Although the House is not expected to act on the proposal before Congress adjourns this month, Gravel said Senate passage of the act was "an important first step toward improving the health care of Native Americans."

The bill lists and expands a variety of health programs and services that are already public law, but because of insufficient funding have never really operated to provide needed care for Native Americans.

The goal of the bill is to allow maximum participation of Indians and other Native Americans the health programs they receive.

The legislation will provide medical scholarships to Natives and to others who will serve in Native communities. It will train doctors in modern techniques and get them out into the field where their skills are so sorely needed.

The bill would authorize \$400 million over a five year period for hospital construction. Other funds would be used for improved eye and dental care and adequate funding for supplies and laboratory equipment. In addition, it would upgrade water and sanitation facilities and establish "outreach" programs to make health services more accessible

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in urban areas.

"So far, neither the House or the executive branch has taken seriously any legislation to improve Native American health care," Gravel said.

"We in the Senate acted now on this bill to get some attention to the problems it addresses, with hope that concrete final action will be taken early next year in the new session of Congress. Action on this bill today, is therefore, an important first step toward improving the health care of Native Americans."

Gravel said that much of the Senate support for the bill resulted from a conference organized by himself and some of his colleagues in Washington this past February.

The National Planning Conference on Indian Health Care was the first such gathering ever held in which recipients of Indian Health Services evaluated that care for lawmakers.

That Conference basked the measure which merged as the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, which passed the Senate Nov. 26. (Among those attending the conference were 16 Alaska Natives who described health care services in Alaska.)