



SUPPORTING INDIAN COUNTRY

Multiple Thune-led legislative efforts help address challenges facing Indian Country

The culture and traditions of South Dakota's nine tribes have greatly contributed to the rich history of our state and nation. At the same time, our tribes continue to face numerous challenges. During Sen. Thune's time in Congress, he has worked collaboratively with tribal leaders and tribal citizens to address many of these challenges at the federal level.

Highlights of Sen. Thune's efforts to Improve Tribal Law Enforcement:

- Sen. Thune continues to work to address public safety issues in Indian Country. An important accomplishment was the enactment of the Tribal Law and Order Act, of which Sen. Thune was an original cosponsor. This law allows federal magistrates to hold court and other proceedings in tribal court and increases the maximum hiring age of Bureau of Indian Affairs law enforcement officers, both of which are a positive step forward to increased safety and rule of law in Indian Country.

Highlights of Sen. Thune's Efforts to Improve Tribal Education:

- Sen. Thune continues to work to ensure adequate resources are available to tribal grant schools in Indian Country. An important accomplishment was the enactment of Sen. Thune's legislation to allow tribal grant schools to participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefits and Federal Employees Group Life Insurance programs and cover at least the employer's share of the premiums. This change will free up resources to improve recruiting and retention efforts for professional educators in tribal communities by allowing schools to spend less on health insurance and more on education-specific items.

Highlights of Sen. Thune's Efforts to Improve Tribal Veterans' Access to Health Care:

- Sen. Thune continues to work to improve coordination between the Indian Health Service (IHS) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), something that is necessary for these agencies to deliver the kind of care our tribal veterans deserve. Veterans, especially tribal veterans who are eligible for care from IHS and VA, shouldn't have to incur additional health care costs on referrals from one system to the other. Another important accomplishment was the enactment of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvements Act of 2020. Among its many important provisions, this law eliminates copayments for Native American veterans accessing VA health care,

bringing parity between services provided at VA and IHS. This provision was based on legislation originally introduced by Sen. Thune.

Highlights of Sen. Thune's Efforts to Improve Tribal Infrastructure:

- As a member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Sen. Thune continues to be a leading advocate for federal transportation policy that benefits Indian Country. Sen. Thune introduced bipartisan legislation that would increase tribal transportation funding flexibility and improve the transparency and consistency of the Tribal Transportation Program's administration and data collection practices. This legislation would take several important steps to ensure that South Dakota tribes get their fair share of funding to maintain and improve their transportation infrastructure.

Highlights of Sen. Thune's Efforts to Improve Tribal Housing:

- Sen. Thune continues to encourage homeownership across Indian Country. Affordable housing opportunities on tribal trust land can be hard to come by in South Dakota and across the nation, due in part to the Bureau of Indian Affairs' challenging mortgage approval process, which can complicate lenders' ability to provide financing and participate in federal tribal housing programs. Sen. Thune introduced legislation that would expedite this mortgage approval process and encourage more lenders to provide mortgages across Indian Country, which would, in turn, expand tribal members' opportunities for homeownership.