

State of South Dakota

SEVENTY-SIXTH SESSION
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, 2001

660E0082

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 2

Introduced by: Senators Albers, Brown (Arnold), Hagen, Hutmacher, and Putnam and
Representatives Nachtigal, Napoli, and Valandra at the request of Interim
State-Tribal Relations Committee

1 A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION, Urging the federal government to authorize and fund long-
2 term health care on Indian reservations.

3 WHEREAS, among all the states in the Northern Plains region, South Dakota has the highest
4 percentage of its Native American population, sixty-seven percent, living on Indian reservations.

5 In addition, South Dakota is experiencing a growing elderly population on its Indian
6 reservations; and

7 WHEREAS, Native Americans are living significantly longer today than they did in the early
8 1900s. The life expectancy of Native Americans in South Dakota is currently sixty-five. This
9 increased life expectancy presents new challenges in caring for the elderly and creates the need
10 for elderly care facilities to provide services that were once provided solely by the family; and

11 WHEREAS, the rate of debilitating diseases, particularly diabetes, on South Dakota Indian
12 reservations has been increasing over the years. The age-adjusted diabetes mellitus death rate
13 among Native Americans in South Dakota is 62.6 per 100,000 population, which is five times
14 higher than the combined rate for all races in the United States; and

15 WHEREAS, Native American culture strongly embraces the extended family in which elders



1 are considered the source of wisdom, history, and tradition; and

2 WHEREAS, a loss of important cultural traditions for families and tribal members occurs
3 when elderly Native Americans must seek nursing facility placement off the reservations. This
4 separation means social and cultural isolation at a time in elders' lives when understanding and
5 cultural support are most important; and

6 WHEREAS, due to the high percentage of Native American families below poverty level
7 living on Indian reservations, lack of transportation to visit family members in nonreservation
8 nursing homes creates a hardship for the elderly and their families; and

9 WHEREAS, the federal government has a long-standing legal and moral obligation to
10 provide for the health care needs of Native Americans on reservations. This obligation is based
11 on treaty and federal law; and

12 WHEREAS, the Indian Health Service currently provides primary and acute health care
13 services, such as physician and hospital care, through federal facilities located on each of the
14 reservations; and

15 WHEREAS, the Indian Health Service currently does not provide long-term care services,
16 such as assisted living and nursing home care, on any of South Dakota's Indian reservations; and

17 WHEREAS, the federal government has failed to take responsibility for providing long-term
18 care services to elderly Native Americans residing on reservations in South Dakota. The federal
19 government has refused to recognize long-term care for Native Americans as a federal
20 responsibility and has failed to provide authorization and funding that would enable the Indian
21 Health Service to provide those needed services; and

22 WHEREAS, the lack of long-term care services has created an undue hardship for
23 reservation residents and their families creating a growing need for the Indian Health Service to
24 appropriately address the long-term care needs of South Dakota's Native American population:

1 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Senate of the Seventy-sixth Legislature
2 of the State of South Dakota, the House of Representatives concurring therein, that the federal
3 government is requested to formally take responsibility for long-term care for Native Americans
4 residing on Indian reservations by providing the necessary authorization and funding to enable
5 the Indian Health Service to offer long-term care for Native American elders on Indian
6 reservations. The United States government must live up to its responsibilities by helping to
7 establish facilities that will allow our Native American elders to spend their final years with
8 dignity in their own communities and cultural surroundings.