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Tribal leaders, advocates, and students gathered at a National Day of Action Rally on the Capitol Grounds in support of the VAWA reauthorization. Photo courtesy of Jesse Renteria



Hundreds Rally in Support of VAWA Reauthorization

Washington, D.C. Yesterday, the National Organization for Women and the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence held a rally on the U.S. Capitol grounds in support of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization.

Hundreds of tribal leaders, advocates, judges, and students committed to ending violence against women urged Congress to pass the Senate version of VAWA, S. 1925, which includes key provisions not found in the House version of the bill, H.R. 4970.

Speakers at the event included:

· The Honorable Daniel Akaka, Chairman, Senate Committee on

Indian Affairs;

· Juana Majel Dixon, National Congress of American Indians;

· Musician Michael Bolton;

· Dr. Avis Jones-DeWeever, National Council of Negro Women;

· Juan Carlos Arean, Casa De Esperanza;

· Terry O'Neill, National Organization for Women (NOW);

· Veda Shook, Association of Flight Attendants International;

· Rabbi David Saperstein, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism;

· Neil Irvin, Men Can Stop Rape;

· Karin Quimby, Human Rights Campaign;

· Colin Goddard, Survivor of the

Virginia Tech shooting; and

· Barbara Palmer, YWCA, among others.

Chairman Daniel Akaka discussed the provisions to protect Native women included in S. 1925. He expressed disappointment that H.R. 4970 did not include similar provisions. "As advocates, we must work together to make VAWA inclusive of all women," said Akaka. Juana Majel Dixon, Co-Chair of NCAI's Domestic Violence Task Force, also discussed the importance of including key tribal provisions that offer protection for Native women and children on Indian lands.

The Senate provisions would empower tribal governments—the

authorities closest to reservation crimes—to intervene early in acts of domestic violence committed by non-Indians on Indian lands. Opponents of the tribal provisions question statistics of non-Indian reservation violence, Congress’ authority to restore tribal power, and the constitutional rights of defendants before tribal courts.

As noted above, the House and Senate versions of the bill are widely different. However, a technical procedure, referred to as a “blue slip”, has prevented the two bills from moving to “conference” where the House and Senate would convene to work on the differences and reach a compromise that could pass both chambers.

The National Task Force held the Rally to re-energize the VAWA Reauthorization efforts. To emphasize the importance of the tribal provisions, NCAI and a group of tribal leaders are spending the rest of the week attending meetings with House and Senate Leadership, key congressional decision makers.

During these meetings tribal leaders, representatives, judges, and law enforcement personnel are directly addressing the significant need for these provisions, sharing personal stories of horrific violence at the hands of non-Natives and the barriers to justice caused by current law. Leaders are also speaking to the constitutional authority - and obligation - of Congress to enact this change, and the rights of defendants.

In addition, the House Native American Caucus Co-Chairs, Congressmen Tom Cole (R-OK) and Dale Kildee (D-MI) have begun circulating a bipartisan “Dear

Colleague” letter to all members of Congress encouraging inclusion of the tribal criminal jurisdiction provisions in final passage of VAWA.

All Tribes are encouraged to continue contacting their federal delegation, issue press reports and other public relations materials about the importance of the tribal provisions, and to conduct local grass roots efforts towards final passage with the tribal provisions in tact. Mapetsi will continue to monitor the progress of the VAWA Reauthorization and report on any activity.

Positive Press Reports

The Rally generated a number of positive press stories supporting the Reauthorization. Below are links to several of these reports:

"VAWA Must Extend To Native Americans, Say Senate Dems" <http://www.talkradionews.com/congress/2012/06/26/vawa-must-extend-to-native-americans-say-senate-dems.html>

"Senate should hold firm on VAWA provisions, Murray says" http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/2chambers/post/senate-should-hold-firm-on-vawa-provisions-murray-says/2012/06/26/gJQAmPBa4V_blog.html

"Women groups rally for Violence Against Women Act in Washington" <http://leanforward.msnbc.msn.com/news/2012/06/27/12436781-women-groups-rally-for-violence-against-women-act-in-washington?lite>

"American Indian Girls Need Better Protection From Violence" http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sherry-hamby-phd/vawa-american-indians_b_1610315.html

Tulalip Tribes Vice Chairwoman Deborah Parker visits with Pauma Councilwoman Juana Majel Dixon (NCAI First Vice President), and Native students from New Mexico. Photo courtesy of Jesse Renteria

