

Legislative Update - April 20, 2001
(Broadcast #351)

Support Needed for Indian Reservation Roads Funding - Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) is requesting from his colleagues in the Senate to sign on to a letter to the Senate Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee in support of full funding of \$275 million in FY2002 for the Indian Reservation Roads (IRR) program. In 1998, Congress reauthorized the IRR program as part of Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). Recognizing the \$4 billion backlog in basic highway and transportation needs in Indian Country, the authorized funding level was increased from \$191 million per year to \$275 million. However, as part of the reauthorization, Congress removed the program's exemption from the obligation limitation, thereby reducing the annual allocation by about \$33 million. Last year the Senate Transportation Appropriations Bill provided the full authorized funding of \$275 million, though it was later reduced by \$8 million in conference to about \$267 million.

The IRR program provides public roads and safe transportation for tribal governments and is also responsible for other roads that provide access to tribal communities. The IRR system comprises 52,738 miles of road. Half are BIA and tribally owned roads and half are state, county and local government roads. These roads serve not only the Native American communities, but also visitors, including recreational, and commercial and industrial users. The IRR program is also an important contributor to economic development, self-determination and employment for Native Americans.

NCAI urges Indian tribes to contact their respective Senators as soon as possible and request that they sign the Bingaman letter by May 4, 2001, providing funding of at least the full authorized level of \$275 million in FY2002. For more information, please contact Dan Albert in Senator Bingaman's office at (202) 224-1808.

For more information, please contact NCAI at 202-466-7767.