



National Congress of American Indians

# NCAI News

**NCAI Update - August 21, 2001**  
(Broadcast #376)

**Dorgan, Stevens Introduce Bill To Attract Tech Workers To Rural Areas** - On August 2, Senators Dorgan (D-ND) and Stevens (R-AK) introduced the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Homesteading Act (S. 1342), a bill designed to boost the number of high-skilled technology workers in rural areas, including Indian Country.

The bill would authorize the Agriculture Department to conduct up to six demonstration projects to facilitate the employment of high-tech workers in rural areas. An economic development planning district in a rural area could apply for grant funding equal to the amount of immigration fees paid by employers for foreign high-tech workers in the district. These grant funds could be used to provide education, training, equipment, and infrastructure in connection with the employment of the foreign workers in the district.

Economic development planning districts would have to meet the following criteria in order to receive grant funding:

- The district is located in a state that borders Canada;
- The counties, municipalities, or corporations that comprise the district have signed a resolution to bring high-tech development into the district;
- The district has an outmigration of at least 20 percent of its population over the past 30 years; has high unemployment or poverty rates, or has a population that is 10 percent or more Native American;
- The district has partnered with industry or a higher education institution to recruit high-skilled workers into the district;
- The district has developed an incentive package for high-skilled workers, including job offers and other financial benefits; and
- The district has created a training program for workers living in the district.

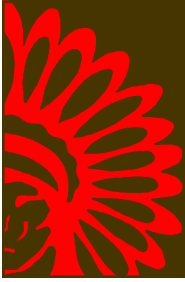
Up to 12,000 foreign workers would be eligible for participation in the demonstration program, with no more than 2,000 workers to be employed in any single demonstration project site.

The bill has been referred to the Judiciary Committee for consideration. It is available online at "[http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi\\_bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=107\\_cong\\_bills&docid=f:s1342is.txt.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi_bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=107_cong_bills&docid=f:s1342is.txt.pdf)".

**Rural Utilities Service Offers Grants For Internet Access** - The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) recently announced the availability of grant funds under a new pilot program to promote Internet access in rural communities.

Program funds may be used to finance the acquisition, construction, and installation of equipment, facilities, and systems to provide dial-up Internet services to communities of up to 20,000 inhabitants. Grants may also be used to fund lease costs for transmission equipment, facilities, and systems for up to two years.

A total of \$2 million in grant funding is available, with a maximum award of \$400,000 and a minimum award of \$10,000, with no matching fund requirement. Grants will be made to legally organized entities providing or proposing to provide dial-up services in rural areas. Such entities include public bodies and commercial businesses, cooperatives, and nonprofit organizations.



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Applicants must show that the proposed project will be sustainable for five years. Factors to be considered are whether there will be sufficient revenues in excess of operating expenditures and whether there is a reasonable assurance of achieving proposed market penetration projections.

Funding will be awarded on a competitive basis until the \$2 million appropriation is used in its entirety. The application deadline is November 13, 2001.

A copy of the grant announcement, which contains more information about the application process, is available online at:

[http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi\\_bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=2001\\_register&docid=01\\_20560\\_filed.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi_bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=2001_register&docid=01_20560_filed.pdf)

**Alaska Governor Drops Katie John Appeal** – In a major victory for Native subsistence rights, the Governor of Alaska, Tony Knowles (D), has ended the pursuit of an appeal of Alaska Native subsistence rights. The Governor said that the state “must stop a losing legal strategy that threatens to make a permanent divide among Alaskans, I believe Alaska must do everything it can to protect, not fight, the subsistence rights of rural Alaskans. Therefore, I cannot continue to oppose in court what I know in my heart to be right.”

This ends ten years of the fight led by Katie John, an Athabascan elder, who first sued the Alaskan government in 1991 for priority subsistence rights for Alaska Natives. Subsistence rights had been consistently upheld in court cases over the past decade, including a case in the Ninth Circuit Court. The Alaska government had been criticized by Native groups for repeatedly attempting to appeal the case, even though every one of those attempts failed.

**Introduced Legislation Seeks to Expand States’ Role in BIA Processes** – Two bills introduced on August 2, 2001 by Connecticut Senators Christopher Dodd (D) and Joseph Lieberman (D) seek to expand the role of states and local governments in BIA processes.

The first bill, S. 1392, or the Tribal Recognition and Indian Bureau Enhancement Act of 2001, establishes new procedures for Tribal recognition, and opens the process to “any interested group” including state and local governments, by allowing them to call public hearings on any recognition application.

The other bill, S. 1393, seeks to “provide grants to ensure full and fair participation in certain decision making processes” at the BIA. This bill would open up the processes of Federal Recognition, Trust Status, Trust Land petitions, and Land Claims to state and local governments, and would provide up to \$500,000 to groups for their use in addressing these or other issues that would “likely significantly affect citizens represented by a local government.”

These bills are potentially damaging to Tribal sovereignty and will serve to confuse and hinder BIA processes that are already mired in bureaucracy. Tribal leaders are asked to oppose these bills, copies of which can be obtained by going to <http://thomas.loc.gov> or by contacting NCAI. The staff of NCAI will monitor these bills, and will be in contact with the Senate Committee to try to kill the bills at that level.

**For more information, contact NCAI at (202) 466-7767.**