

Commission on Native Children – Quotes from North Dakota Supporters

“Our children represent the pride and the lifeblood of our tribe and our way of life. In their faces we see the perseverance of our ancestors, and we put our strength in them to carry us forward. Senator Heitkamp’s Commission on Native Children, named after the late Alyce Spotted Bear who was a lifelong educator and leader from MHA Nation dedicated to caring for our children, shows her deep commitment to treating our young people as sacred – by making sure they have the education, health care, and support they need to thrive. This Commission honors Alyce Spotted Bear’s life, and we are devoted to this effort to continuing her life’s work.”

- ***Mark Fox, Chairman, Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation***

“Senator Heitkamp has been unwavering in her commitment to protect our children, and her work to create a Commission on Native Children is just the latest example of her tireless efforts to make this world a better place for them. Our children are vibrant, creative, and strong – and each one deserves the health care, the education, and the support Senator Heitkamp’s bill is working toward. This bill is a crucial step in getting each of our children the right protections, and our young people in juvenile justice programs the dedicated, educated adult advocates they need. We’re counting on our kids to light the way for our future – and we need to give them the opportunities to shine.”

- ***Richard McCloud, Chairman, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians***

“Protecting our children means protecting our way of life, and Senator Heitkamp’s tireless leadership and work to address the needs of Native children shows her deep understanding of that truth. Her Commission on Native Children is not just a piece of legislation to us – it’s bringing families and children out of the shadows and shining a light on the severely disparate nature of the challenges Native children face. By gathering the truths of higher health disparities, higher juvenile incarceration rates, and the staggering need for foster child protective services and foster care services among our people, we can unearth new solutions and begin to heal. We can pave a pathway for our children to grow and flourish.”

- ***Myra Pearson, Chairwoman, Spirit Lake Dakota Nation***

“When Senator Heitkamp visits our reservation, she knows our faces, our names, and our stories. We aren’t statistics to her – she knows the challenges our children struggle with every day and the challenges they’re going to meet down the road. But instead of accepting those challenges as hard-and-fast truths, she’s working to find new solutions to change outcomes. That’s what her Commission on Native Children is all about – getting ahead of those challenges in a way that puts a child’s face to every far-away problem our legislators forget – and building up hope and opportunity for Native kids for generations to come.”

- ***Dave Archambault II, Chairman, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe***

“Raised just miles from our lands, Senator Heitkamp has understood from a young age what the struggles of Native children really are – and as she has continued to serve the people of North Dakota, she has taken the voices of our children with her every step of the way. That is why this bill to create a Commission on Native Children was her first bill as a U.S. Senator – because she won’t give up on making sure that each of our children knows that they matter, and making sure Congress knows that they matter. Too often our kids are denied equal opportunity to the

education, health and safety they deserve – and this bill works to change that. We are proud to stand with Senator Heitkamp today as she takes steps toward improving the lives of our children, and the future of our tribe.”

- ***Bruce Renville, Chairman, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate***

“The Commission on Native Children, authorized in Senator Heitkamp’s legislation, is an important step in acknowledging the needs of Native American children and the gaps in resources to address those needs. Senator Heitkamp demonstrates a commitment to Native American children by introducing such a bill early in the Congress and it is incredible to see a significant group of bipartisan Senators join her in this commitment. Our government has made promises to Indian Country and I believe that our youngest First Americans should be a top priority. I am looking forward to working with Senator Heitkamp and the other co-sponsors through my work at the Center for Native American Youth, an organization I created when I retired from several decades in Congress. At CNAY, we are working to shine a light on and develop solutions to the unique challenges facing Native American youth, while celebrating success and promoting hope. Senator Heitkamp’s legislation is a positive and welcome step in our collective efforts to improve the lives of Native American children.”

- ***U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan (ret.), founder and chairman of Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute***

“The Tribal Leaders support Sen. Heitkamp’s efforts to introduce The Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children, we believe in early childhood education and the health and safety of our native children. We look forward to working with her as the Legislation goes forward.”

- ***John Yellowbird Steele, President, Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association (GPTCA)***

“United Tribes Technical College is a strong supporter of Senator Heitkamp’s legislation for the creation of a Commission on Native Children. The legislation focuses on protecting children who are our most vulnerable population, considered sacred, and are the future for our people. American Indian children residing on the Northern Plains and in North Dakota suffer disproportionately in regard to poverty, behavioral health, suicide, and health disparities. The Nation has provided federal support to fulfill trust responsibilities to tribal nations; however, these funds continue to be inadequate to provide the full range of services available to non-native populations. Our hope is that the Commission on Native Children will identify and provide stronger data, partnerships, best practices, resources, coordination, and lastly and most importantly, stronger outcomes regarding Native children.”

- ***Leander “Russ” McDonald, PhD, President, United Tribes Technical College (UTTC)***