

# News Release

National American Indian Housing Council



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## **NAIHC Vice-Chair Cheryl Parish Testifies Before House Natural Resources Committee on HEARTH Act**

*HR 2523 enables tribes to enact their own tribal leasing regulations*

WASHINGTON—Wednesday, October 21, 2009—The National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC) Vice-Chair Cheryl Parish testifies before the House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee today regarding HR 2523, “Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Homeownership Act of 2009” or the “HEARTH Act.” In her testimony, Vice-Chair Parish calls for tribes to be given the authority to enter into certain leases without the review or approval from the Secretary of the Department of Interior.

“In Bay Mills, the tribal council believes homeownership should be as accessible as possible for tribal members. A land office, located within the housing authority, oversees the leasing agreements, secures banking and assists development,” said NAIHC Vice-Chair Parish, a member of the Bay Mills Chippewa Indians and Executive Director of the Bay Mills Housing Authority in Michigan. “This legislation can only be beneficial to tribes, though some tribes may not be ready for the responsibility, many will embrace it. It is a perfect fit for tribal self-determination.”



The “HEARTH Act,” introduced by Rep. Martin Heinrich (D-NM-1st) before the congressional summer recess, will reform federal leasing requirements, encourage housing and community development in tribal communities and calls for a report from the Bureau of Indian Affairs detailing the history and experience of tribes that have chosen to assume responsibility for operating the Indian Land Title and Records Office.

“The HEARTH Act opens doors to homeownership for Native American families in New Mexico and across the country,” said Rep. Heinrich. “I will continue to work with my colleagues on the Natural Resources Committee to reform the trust land leasing process so that it works for Indian communities.”

Under the current leasing law, Indian tribes – except the Tulalip Tribes and the Navajo Nation – are presented with two options: they may choose to operate under the strictures of the “Indian Long-Term Leasing Act of 1955,” which requires secretarial approval, or they may secure a 99-

year lease authority through the enactment of tribe-specific Federal legislation. Both the Tulalip Tribes and the Navajo Nation have gone through such legislation.

“I thank the bill’s sponsor, Rep. Heinrich, for looking out for the betterment of not only the Native people in his state, but for all the Natives throughout the United States,” Vice-Chair Parish said. “The NAIHC is ready to work with Congress on these and any other issues to improve Indian housing programs and living conditions for America’s first people.”

Photo Caption: (L-R) House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Nick Rahall, NAIHC Vice-Chair Cheryl Parish, Congressman Dale Kildee and Congressman Martin Heinrich.

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*NAIHC assists tribes and tribal housing entities in reaching their self-determined goals of providing culturally relevant, decent, safe, sanitary, and quality affordable housing for Native people in Indian communities, Alaska Native villages and Native Hawaiian Communities.*

*NAIHC... “A Tradition of Native American Housing” [www.naihc.net](http://www.naihc.net)*