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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **NAIHC Executive Director Testifies at Congressional Field Hearing on the Indian Veterans Housing Opportunity Act**

*NAIHC calls for fair eligibility in obtaining adequate, affordable housing*

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—April 10, 2010—The National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC) Executive Director Mellor C. Willie testified before the House Finance Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity today regarding Representative Ann Kirkpatrick’s (D-1<sup>st</sup>-AZ) draft legislation titled the *Indian Veterans Housing Opportunity Act of 2009* (H.R. 3553). The Act would broaden the ability of Indian veterans and their families to obtain affordable and secure housing in their home communities after they return from military service.

“Native Americans are the first to answer the call of duty to protect this great country that we all call home. Yet, sadly, they often return to their homelands to face extraordinary challenges that other veterans do not face in obtaining safe, quality and affordable housing,” Willie said. “The Indian Veterans Housing Opportunity Act will remedy this situation and level the playing field for all Indian veterans by revising the definition of income for NAHASDA purposes to exclude payments for service-related disability, dependence or indemnity.”

Under the current statutory language of *Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 2008* (NAHASDA), it is problematic that some veterans and their families face the possibility of being ineligible for housing assistance because of “income” earned as a result of service-related disabilities or death. The Internal Revenue Service excludes such amounts from the definition of income, however the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which administers the NAHASDA funding, does consider the payments as “income.” Rep. Kirkpatrick’s legislation would remedy this barrier.

“I am honored to be hosting a field hearing on the Navajo Nation with Chairwoman Waters and so many leaders in the Native American, veteran and housing communities,” Rep. Kirkpatrick said. “This is an important opportunity to share our stories with folks back in Washington and shed light on the issues. Native American veterans have

sacrificed so much for this country, and they should not be punished for getting the benefits they have been promised. It is time to right this wrong and ensure our fighting men and women are not disadvantaged by their service.”

The legislation will guarantee that both the statutory language of NAHASDA and HUD’s implementing regulations are in line with the Internal Revenue Code and existing regulations. It will also ensure that Indian veterans do not face extraordinary obstacles when trying to procure or finance appropriate and affordable housing after serving their country.

“NAHASDA was enacted to provide Indian tribes and Native American communities with new and creative tools necessary to develop culturally relevant, safe, decent, affordable housing,” Willie said. “Native American soldiers who have put themselves in harm’s way protecting our nation should not be penalized for their service to this great country. NAIHC asks for swift action on this important legislation.”

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*The National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC) was founded in 1974 as a 501(c)(3) corporation. NAIHC is the only national organization representing housing interests of Native people who reside in Indian communities, Alaska Native Villages, and on native Hawaiian Home Lands.*