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Bills target reservation meth

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The emerging methamphetamine crisis on American Indian reservations has generated four congressional bills, including one sponsored by Rep. Barbara Cubin, R-Wyo.

Together with Montana's Denny Rehberg and other bipartisan supporters, Cubin is sponsoring HR 405, to "make funding for family-based treatment available to rural and other underserved areas (like reservations) hardest hit by meth."

Cubin's bill has provisions related to the meth crisis on reservations, requiring the Department of Health and Human Services to report on the number of pregnant and parenting women in need of treatment for meth addiction, with the data compiled by tribe and state.

The bill would amend the Public Health Services Act and would support local programs providing counseling, medical treatment, parenting training, education and legal services to mothers (and their children) who are recovering from meth addiction.

"As a state with the fifth-highest per capita rate in the nation of people seeking treatment for meth, it's clear that Wyoming has a critical lack of treatment options," said Cubin, who serves on the House Meth Caucus, a coalition of members dedicated to fighting meth.

Cubin's bill would provide \$70 million annually (2008-2012) to fund comprehensive, family-based treatment programs for pregnant and parenting women; prioritize rural areas with high rates of addiction; and provide \$40 million to \$50 million in grants for non-violent offender treatment programs, as an alternative to jail or prison.

Crisis in Indian Country

The meth problem is acutely felt on the Wind River Indian Reservation, home to the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone tribes.

Last April, Eastern Shoshone Business Council Chairman Ivan Posey testified before the Senate Indian Affairs Committee noting that meth:

- * Plays a large role in 65 percent of child neglect and placement of children in foster care.
- * Is available to students of all ages, on or off the reservation.
- * Results in more vehicle accidents, more domestic violence incidents and longer hospital stays for those reasons, pushing the reservation health system to the breaking point.
- * Contributed to four homicides, 284 drug misdemeanors and 124 child abuse cases in 2004.

At that same hearing, Wyoming U.S. Attorney Matt Mead testified about a Mexican drug gang that deliberately targeted Indian reservations (Wyoming, South Dakota and Nebraska) for sales and distribution of meth, with a street value of \$4.5 million to \$6.8 million -- capturing customers by giving away free samples.

Indian communities have the highest use rates-- more than double the use rate of other ethnicities. Additionally, when the Bureau of Indian Affairs surveyed tribes about law enforcement, more than 70 percent said that meth is the drug that poses the greatest threat to their reservation.

"Law enforcement and the courts are doing their part," Posey said. "We need to concentrate more on prevention and treatment, especially helping people get treatment before they wind up in court."

Other bills

There are companion House and Senate bills to amend the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets

Act of 1968 to clarify that territories and Indian tribes are eligible to receive grants for confronting the use of methamphetamine.

Rep. Tom Udall, D-NM explained that the Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act of 2005 unintentionally left out tribal governments as possible applicants for the Hot Spots and Drug-Endangered Children program grants in something one of the bills would correct. Hot Spots provides funding for anti-methamphetamine initiatives, while the Drug-Endangered Children Grant Program provides comprehensive services to assist children who live in homes where meth has been used, manufactured and sold.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., has a similar bill.

Meanwhile, Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., has a bill that would require the attorney general to report on the effects of meth on reservations. It also reduces the threshold requirements for imposing enhanced criminal penalties on people trafficking, manufacturing and distributing methamphetamine.