



## **2019 Winter Convention Portland, Oregon**

### **RESOLUTION #19 – 15**

#### **“SUPPORT FOR LEGISLATION THAT ESTABLISHES A DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS’ TRIBAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE”**

#### **PREAMBLE**

We, the members of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants rights secured under Indian Treaties, Executive Orders, and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and constitution of the United States and several states, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise to promote the welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution:

**WHEREAS**, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) are representatives of and advocates for national, regional, and specific tribal concerns; and

**WHEREAS**, ATNI is a regional organization comprised of American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) and tribes in the states of Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Nevada, Northern California, and Alaska; and

**WHEREAS**, the health, safety, welfare, education, economic and employment opportunity, and preservation of cultural and natural resources are primary goals and objectives of the ATNI; and

**WHEREAS**, AI/AN Veterans have played a vital role in the United States military for over two hundred years in all of the United State’s wars since the Revolutionary War and have served in several wars before they were even recognized as American citizens; and

**WHEREAS**, AI/AN Veterans have distinctive cultural values that drive them to serve their country; and

**WHEREAS**, AI/ANs serve in the United States Armed Forces at higher rates per capita, are younger as a cohort and have a higher concentration of female Service members compared to all other Service members, yet they are underrepresented among Veterans who access the services and benefits they have earned; and

**WHEREAS**, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics counted 11,028 AI/AN Veterans in the Northwest; and

**WHEREAS**, in FY 2016, there were 1,775 AI/AN Veterans in Idaho, 3,151 in Oregon, and 6,102 in Washington; and

**WHEREAS**, the Veterans Affairs (VA) must take into consideration that AI/AN Veterans are more likely to lack health insurance and to have a disability, service-connected or otherwise, than Veterans of other races; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2010, the American Community Survey highlighted about 19 % of AI/AN Veterans had a service-connected disability rating in 2010; and

**WHEREAS**, in FY 2016, the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics reported that AI/AN Veterans have lower incomes, lower educational attainment, and higher unemployment than Veterans of other races; and

**WHEREAS**, for the VA to better serve AI/AN Veterans after their service, the VA must create a Tribal Advisory Committee (TAC) to address inequities of AI/AN Veterans and to fulfill the federal trust responsibility; and

**WHEREAS**, the creation of a VA TAC is critical to ensuring that the VA in partnership with tribes provides comprehensive culturally responsive care and benefits to our AI/AN Veterans; and

**WHEREAS**, a VA TAC would provide an opportunity for meaningful tribal consultation and deliberation on issues that pertain to the complex and varying infrastructure of Indian Health Service and Tribal health care facilities for the 573 federally-recognized tribes in the United States; and

**WHEREAS**, the VA TAC is needed to ensure that effective collaboration and informed decision-making with tribes occurs before, during, and after VA policy decisions are made; and

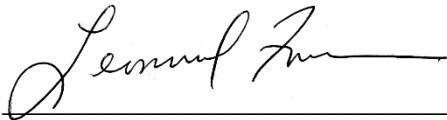
**WHEREAS**, the VA TAC should be comprised of designated tribal representatives to ensure-ongoing communications with the leadership of the VA regarding broad policy decisions that significantly impact the healthcare and well-being of AI/AN Veterans; now

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that ATNI supports legislation that establishes a VA TAC with these provisions:

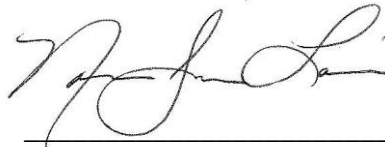
- Membership must be based on Indian Health Service Areas;
- Tribes must be able to select their own representatives to participate on the VA TAC, and such representatives may or may not be elected tribal leaders;
- Include “Alternate Representatives” and Technical Advisors for each Area;
- No term limits on TAC membership except that a TAC member may be replaced if the TAC member is unable to attend two of four meetings in year;
- Membership must include non-voting representatives from the VA Office of Tribal Government Relations and the Indian Health Service;
- Quarterly meetings must be held along with monthly calls, as necessary;
- Inclusion of Subcommittees within the VA TAC to enhance the work of the TAC on various issues impacting AI/AN veterans; and
- Inclusion of an annual report from the VA to tribes as well as Congress.

**CERTIFICATION**

The foregoing resolution was adopted at the 2019 Winter Convention of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, held at the Doubletree by Hilton – Portland Oregon, on January 28-31, 2019, with a quorum present.



Leonard Forsman, President



Norma Jean Louie, Secretary