Act supports health care/food security in tribal communities

U. S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) was joined in a bipartisan, bicameral effort July 23 to introduce the Native American Seeds Protection Act of 2019. The introduction of the act took place in Washington, D.C., where he was joined in the announcement by Martha McSally (R-Ariz.), U.S. Assistant House Speaker Ben Ray Lujan (D- N.M.) and U. S. Representatives Don Young (R-Alaska), Betty McCollum (D-Minn.), and Tom Cole (R-Okla.). The act is designed to clearly identify ways to protect Native American seeds and traditional food products, and assist tribes in ensuring that cultural practices and traditional ways of life are preserved.

This legislation would direct the Government Accountability Office to study applicable trademark and intellectual property laws, the long-term viability of Native American seeds, and provide recommendations on how to ensure Native American seeds and traditional foods may be protected for future generations. This bill would also assess the impact of foods and seeds fraudulently marketed as traditional to or produced by Native Americans.

“Our tribal communities have always enhanced New Mexico’s rich culture and traditions,” Heinrich said. “I am proud to lead this bipartisan, bicameral effort to ensure that tribes’ cultural practices and way of life are preserved for future generations. Protecting Native seeds and traditional food products will allow tribes to grow and create their own healthful food products and in turn spur economic development in Indian Country and provide new opportunities in the agriculture sector.”

“The traditions of Arizona’s tribal communities are deeply intertwined in our state’s history,” McSally said. “It is important that Congress preserve these traditions for generations to come. I am proud to join my colleagues to introduce bipartisan, bicameral legislation to enhance protections for Native American seeds and food products in order to continue the long-standing traditions of all tribal communities.”

“As someone who comes from a long-line of New Mexico farmers, I know safeguarding our agricultural heritage is a fight we cannot afford to lose. For Tribal communities, protecting indigenous seed varieties is also a crucial exercise of tribes’ inherent sovereignty and the federal government’s trust responsibility,” Luján pointed out.

“Alaska Native seeds and food products are a central component of Alaska culture, and it is critical these traditional ways of life are preserved,” Young added. “I am proud to join a bipartisan and bicameral group of advocates on this important legislation to ensure that future generations of Alaskans can fully appreciate the history and culture of our state’s tribes. Protecting the culture of our Alaska Native communities is an important part of my work in Congress, and I will keep working as a member of the Subcommittee on Indigenous Peoples toward this very important goal.”

“This legislation will protect and preserve Native seeds, and by doing so, will protect food sources important to our Native American brothers and sisters,” said McCollum. “This effort supports the work tribal nations are doing to ensure food security, economic development, and health benefits for Native communities by maintaining these rich cultural practices for years to come. I especially applaud the leadership of Minnesota’s Dakota and Ojibwe tribal nations to preserve and restore indigenous nutrition.”

“Agriculture is an integral part of Native American culture, and I am proud to join my colleagues in introducing legislation to combat the fraudulent use of traditional Native American foods,” Cole said. This bill not only seeks to preserve Native culture in the realm of agriculture, but it rightly helps struggling communities in Indian Country realize more of the economic gain that may have been taken by others falsely claiming to grow and sell authentic Native crops.”

The Native American Seeds Protection Act of 2019 is fully supported by the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the Native Farm Bill Coalition, the Pueblo of Tesuque, and the

Navajo Nation.

“We thank Senator Heinrich for his support of native seeds and traditional food products and farming practices,” Pueblo of Tesuque Governor Milton Herrera said. “Our seeds and traditional foods are foundations of our culture, and the study that this legislation authorizes will provide much-needed insight into how we can better protect them for future generations. This information will also help tribes develop new sources of economic opportunity and employment, and help Native communities increase access to local, healthy food options.”

“I thank Senator Heinrich for introducing the Native American Seeds Protection Act of 2019,” Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez said. “Native seeds are essential to our traditions and cultural heritage. For instance, we have native seeds produced by Navajo farmers for use in traditional ceremonies and Navajo dishes. Protecting these types of native seeds will help promote our local agriculture, boost economic development, and help us advance food security for future generations. The Navajo Nation is working to develop a Navajo food policy that advances our food sovereignty and this bill would help our Nation to address this need.”

Staff Reports