

STATEMENT OF GARY L. EDWARDS
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BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS,
REGARDING THE PROBLEM OF METHAMPHETAMINE IN INDIAN COUNTRY

April 05, 2006

Introduction

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice-Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, my name is Gary Edwards and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the National Native American Law Enforcement Association (NNALEA). I am honored and pleased to appear before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, regarding the "Problem of Methamphetamine in Indian Country." Thank you for this opportunity to address you today.

Background on NNALEA

As many of you may be aware, NNALEA is a not-for-profit public service organization founded in 1993, which among other things, provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and new technologies, and establishes networks for training, collaboration, technical assistance, information sharing and investigative assistance between federal, tribal, state and local entities and between all levels of government and the private sector. NNALEA has conducted National Training Conferences across the United States, and is currently planning its fourteenth (14) such Conference for November 14 -16, 2006 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The theme of this year's conference is "The Indian Country Methamphetamine Initiative." Other significant training at the 2006 NNALEA National Training Conference will include: "Tribal Homeland Security"; "Protecting of Tribal Youth;" and "Tribal Law Enforcement, Courts and Detention."

"The Problem of Methamphetamine in Indian Country"

It has become common knowledge that Methamphetamine ("Meth") is a nationwide problem that is affecting both tribal and non-tribal communities. Symptoms experienced by communities plagued by Meth include surges in:

- * Violent Crime;
- * Drug and Booze Parties;
- * Domestic Violence;
- * Sexually Abused Children;
- * Drug-Addicted Babies;

- * Violent Paranoia;
- * In-Home Lab Explosions and Fires; and even
- * Death.

What, however, may not be common knowledge is that Meth appears to be a bigger problem for tribal communities in relation to non-tribal communities. In addition, most tribal communities are more susceptible to Meth problems, than are non-tribal communities. There are at least four (4) reasons for these differences.

One reason is the correlation between Meth and alcoholism. More particularly, research suggests that Meth distribution plans (i.e., of smuggling cartels) identify alcohol addicts as a primary consumer base targeted for Meth distribution. Unfortunately, the ethnic group with one of the highest rates of alcohol addicts is Native Americans. Accordingly, Native Americans and their tribal communities are and have been prime targets for Meth distributors.

A second reason pertains to the financial conditions of most tribal communities. Most tribal communities rank at or near the bottom of most financial parameters. As such, members of these tribal communities who utilize illicit drugs are inclined to use the "cheaper" drugs. Meth is one of the cheapest of all illicit drugs thereby making it a drug of choice by drug abusers in tribal communities.

A third reason pertains to the geography of many Tribes. More particularly, research suggests that the majority of Meth distributed in tribal communities is smuggled through the U.S. borders with Mexico and Canada. In its recent TBS Pilot Program, NNALEA and its partners identified forty-one (41) Tribes who had tribal lands located within one hundred (100) miles of the U.S. borders with Mexico and Canada. In participating in the TBS Pilot Program, the majority of the participating Tribes reported that they had encountered drug smuggling across their respective borders. Undoubtedly, these tribal communities, among others, are and have been prime targets for the distribution of Meth by smuggling cartels.

A fourth reason pertains to the numerous jurisdiction issues that confront Tribes that do not confront many non-Tribal communities. Examples of such issues are Public Law 280, and outdated tribal codes wherein Meth is not specifically identified as a crime.

Thus, it is very important that tribal communities be a top priority in the "War Against Meth." NNALEA believes, and agrees with the current administration, that this "War Against Meth" should focus upon the following: (1) Prevention and Treatment; (2) Law Enforcement; (3) Education; and (4) Management of Meth's Unique Consequences.

In addition, NNALEA believes that an Indian Country Drug Czar should be appointed to specifically assist the National Drug Czar with the "War Against Meth." This Indian Country Drug Czar should be tasked through the BIA-OLES office. Further, to fight the "Indian Country War Against METH," NNALEA suggest that additional funding be provided to the BIA-OLES in the amounts of: (1) \$5 million for Indian Country law enforcement support in FY 06 and \$10 million for Indian Country law enforcement support in FY 07; (2) \$7 million for Indian Country

detention facilities , staffing and training in FY 06 and \$10 million for Indian Country detention facilities, staffing and training in FY 07; and (3) \$3 million for coordination of the “Indian Country War Against METH” five year strategic plan in FY 06 and \$5 million for coordination of the “Indian Country War Against METH” five year strategic plan in FY 07.

NNALEA also recommends a funding increase of \$5 million for the Indian Health Service to plan and implement its strategy for the “Indian Country War Against METH” in FY 06 as well as a funding increase of \$10 million for the Indian Health Service to plan and implement its strategy for the “Indian Country War Against METH” in FY 07.

Tribes also are affected by broader processes such as: homeland security issues; global warming; population growth, and globalization. METH is both a problem in itself and a symptom of broader stress for Indian Country. The USA Patriot Act, additional funding and an Indian Country Drug Czar are weapons in the “Indian Country War Against METH” as well as for the fight against the broader stress issues for Tribes. However, winning the “Indian Country War Against METH” will be achieved by Tribal leaders, Tribal councils, Tribal elders and Tribal communities that carry the “War Lance” symbolizing that Indian people will not tolerate drug use!

In closing, I think that the words of the great Sioux Chief, Sitting Bull are appropriate here -- “...let us put our minds together and see what kind of a future we can build for our children.”

Hope is strong medicine –“Keep Hope Alive.” I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gary L. Edwards
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National Native American Law Enforcement Association