

Testimony of Sam McCracken, General Manager of NIKE N7, and Chairman of
the N7 Fund

Before the U.S. Senate, Committee on Indian Affairs

November 29, 2012

Good afternoon. Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Barrasso, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in celebration of Native American Heritage Month. It's an honor to share with you the work of NIKE N7, and join with you in efforts to improve the lives of our Native American youth.

My name is Sam McCracken and I am a member of the Fort Peck Tribe. At NIKE, I am the General Manager for NIKE N7, and serve as Chairman of the N7 Fund. In this role, I have had the opportunity to work closely with government officials and community elders to endow programs that serve our community.

N7 is inspired by the Native American wisdom of the seven generations: In every deliberation we must consider the impact of our decisions on the seventh generation. The ultimate goal of the N7 Fund is to consider this footprint and to help Native American youth recognize their proud history and build on it for a triumphant future.

What is N7 and the N7 Fund?

NIKE N7 is a community program and product collection within NIKE that empowers Native American and Aboriginal communities through the power of sport and physical activity. The mission of the N7 Fund is to unleash the power of sport and all its benefits in these communities. The N7 Fund consists of contributions from donors and sales profits from the innovative Air Native N7 shoe and N7 Collection. The Air Native was unveiled in 2007, a new performance athletic shoe designed specifically for American Indians. The shoe was the product of more than two years of scientific analysis and work and not only has a larger fit for the distinct foot shape of American Indians, but also the culturally specific look for our community. One hundred percent of the N7 funds are provided in grants to non-profit community groups working to

promote physical activity for youth. NIKE bears all administrative costs for the N7 Fund.

Challenges Facing Native American Youth

The issues facing Native American youth are daunting. As Members of this Committee know, Native American and Aboriginal children face challenges to their success and wellbeing that call for immediate action. They experience the highest rate of poverty of any racial or ethnic group in North America, and by nearly all measurable standards – dropout rates, college attendance and completion rates, test scores, even literacy rates – Native American and Aboriginal children are well behind their peers. Suicide rates for Native American youth are 127 percent higher than the national average.

Native communities also suffer disproportionately from the negative effects of diabetes and obesity. Diabetes inflicts Native Americans at a rate of 2.2 times higher the national average. One antidote for change is sport. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, regular physical activity reduces the risk of developing diabetes, colon cancer and high blood pressure. An active lifestyle helps people develop and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints, especially if begun at an early age. Fitness also promotes psychological well-being, reducing feelings of depression and anxiety. And, the research now shows, regular physical activity can improve academic performance.

That is why N7 funds community programs designed to get youth active and moving. I'd like to take a moment to highlight a few of our grant recipients:

- **NB3 Foundation:** In 2005, 4-time PGA TOUR winner Notah Begay III, the only full-blooded Native American on the PGA TOUR, founded the Notah Begay III (NB3) Foundation. Notah, throughout his career, has been a passionate and committed advocate for the health and well-being of Native American youth and their communities. He formed the NB3 Foundation to use sports and wellness as a means for social change and to fight the epidemic of type 2 diabetes.

Based at the Santa Ana Pueblo in New Mexico, the NB3 Foundation operates soccer, golf, health and youth leadership programs at San Felipe Pueblo, in the greater Albuquerque area and other tribal

communities in New Mexico. NB3 now serves tribal communities across the country and is a trusted partner of N7.

- In Hawaii, the N7 Fund supports the Makawalu Foundation in Honolulu and Kanalu in Kane'ohe. Both groups operate youth programs that focus on the history and culture of the Native communities.
- In South Dakota, the N7 Fund works closely with the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Three Districts and of Rosebud to support programs supporting a healthy lifestyle.
- In Minnesota, we partner with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Recreation Division to ensure youth programs are available and accessible to kids.

These are just a few of our community partners. Since 2009, the N7 Fund has awarded more than \$2 million in grants. Today, the N7 Fund supports programs serving 125,000 kids. Our goal is to grow the N7 Fund to serve 2 million kids by 2016.

Programs are only effective if our youth choose to participate. We are very fortunate to have a number of leading Native American athletes join us in the work to inspire and motivate our youth. Our N7 Ambassadors lead by example.

- Jacoby Ellsbury is a proud member of the Colorado River Indian Tribe and the first Native American of Navajo descent to play Major League Baseball.
- Tahnee Robinson led her Lander Valley High School basketball team to a Wyoming state championship and went on to star at the University of Nevada. She is only the second American Indian woman to play professional basketball. Tahnee is a member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe in Montana.
- Sam Bradford became the first Native American Player to win a Heisman Trophy. Today, Sam leads the St. Louis Rams, and has worked with N7 and Let's Move in Indian Country to advocate for health achievement for Native youth. Sam is a citizen of the Cherokee Indian nation.

- Chris Wondolowski, a member of the Kiowa tribe, is a leading scorer in the MLS, playing for the San Jose Earthquakes. Chris was in Washington yesterday and had the chance to share his story directly with many of you.

These athletes devote time and attention to N7 to advocate for greater access to sport for Native American children. They know that sport can transform a person, and believe also that sport can transform a people.

Importance of Public-Private Partnerships

At NIKE, we believe in public-private partnerships. We currently have a Memorandum of Understanding with the Bureau of Indian Education at the U.S. Department of the Interior, and with the Indian Health Service. Both are designed to encourage cooperation and collaboration between NIKE and the agencies to work together to educate American Indian and Alaska Native individuals and communities about healthy lifestyles. N7 also has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Corporation for National and Community Service. N7 recently funded 5 VISTA volunteers to serve in Native American community organizations. We are very excited to continue this unique partnership.

Beyond N7, NIKE also is working in communities across the country, seeking partners in the public and private sectors to join us in the fight against the physical inactivity epidemic in America and around the globe not just focused on the Native American community. The centerpiece of this effort is a recently released blueprint and call to action. I encourage you to visit Designedtomove.org for more details.

Federal and tribal governments can and must engage aggressively to tackle the problem. I would urge the Committee's continued support for one vital program in particular that is improving the lives of Native American Youth – the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI). This program provides vital funding for diabetes treatment and prevention to 404 Indian Health Service tribal and urban Indian health programs across the United States. I hope the Reauthorization and full funding for this program will be high on the agenda of the Committee in the 113th Congress.

In conclusion, I also urge each of you to join us. Come see first-hand the work your community groups are doing to serve your constituents. Come play catch, kick a ball or go for a run with a child who benefits from an N7 partnership grant. You will not walk away unaffected or uninspired.

NIKE's CEO, Mark Parker often says that we at NIKE are in the business of helping people achieve their fullest potential, with sport being our vehicle to do so.

Together we can secure a future for Native American and Aboriginal youth that has future generations running, jumping and kicking to reach their full potential.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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