

## **NORTHERN ARAPAHO TRIBE EXITS FEDERAL EMPLOYEE HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM**

*Will become the first tribe in the nation to exit the program, saving over \$1M annually.*

FT. WASHAKIE, WY (Feb 28) Northern Arapaho Business Council Chairman Roy Brown recently transmitted a Notice of Cancellation to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's "Tribal Desk" notifying them that the tribe will be terminating its enrollment in the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program effective March 31, 2018.

"Trying to keep tribes enrolled in the FEHB after subjecting them to the large-employer mandate to begin with adds insult to injury when it comes to the government's long history of diminishing our treaty-pledged healthcare right," said Chairman Brown. "When the large-employer mandate went into effect and our citizens lost the benefits of the individual plans, the government basically held our tribal member data hostage, forcing us into court again to avoid incapacitating our sovereign nation due to paying penalties."

Previously, the tribe enjoyed the option of superior-than-IHS coverage under the individual mandate, and without the threat of financial penalty. In 2015, however, tribal governments became subject to the large-employer mandate that does not take into account special status or exemptions for Native employees, costing the tribes millions in excess. The tribe unsuccessfully sued seeking exemption from the rule in 2015's *Northern Arapaho v. Burwell*.

"While the U.S. is still grossly failing in meeting its healthcare obligations at the expense of our tribal members, at least today we can say we took a step in the best interest of our tribe. We will save over a million dollars a year, and put our healthcare dollars in the hands of a Natives-first healthcare company that won't deprive us of the discounts we are owed the way the federal government did, and BlueCross BlueShield before them," declared Chairman Brown. "Instead of paying large corporations' overhead, we can reinvest the savings in our own communities."

Upon the March 31<sup>st</sup> exit date from the FEHB, the Northern Arapaho Tribe will be partnering with Native-owned FirstNations HealthCare based out of Tulsa, OK. FirstNation will offer services and rates to tribal employees that will feature significantly higher savings than any previous plans the tribe has ever provided.