

Questions for the Record by Democrat Members

Questions from Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva for Hon. William Smith, Chairperson & Alaska Area Representative, National Indian Health Board:

1. Temporary or permanent closures impacted many tribal communities to health clinics and hospitals throughout the pandemic.
 - a. Does the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) have an idea of how many tribal health clinics and hospitals experienced shutdowns in the past year?
2. Your testimony mentions the severe barriers that tribal governments and epidemiology centers have faced throughout this pandemic. Can you please speak further on this issue?
3. You also highlight the inconsistent nature of tribal COVID-19 related data—specifically, how the Indian Health Service’s (IHS) national estimates are likely underrepresenting the impact that COVID-19 has had on tribal communities. Can you please recap why this issue exists?
 - a. How have shortages of reliable data affected the pandemic response efforts of tribal governments and health organizations?
4. Despite this recent success, you also mention that the vaccine rollouts had negatively impacted the government-to-government relationship between the federal government and tribal nations. We understand that tribal health facilities could choose to receive their vaccines from the state or through the IHS system. Would this reliance on the state rather than the federal government contradict the federal trust responsibility?
5. Given your experience as the National Indian Health Board’s (NIHB) Alaska Area Representative, what unique COVID-19 challenges have Alaska Native communities faced that advocates in the lower 48 might have overlooked?