



TURTLE MOUNTAIN BAND OF CHIPPEWA INDIANS

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March 22, 2019

The Honorable Kelly Armstrong
1004 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Advance Appropriations for the Indian Health Service

Dear Congressman Armstrong

On behalf of Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, I strongly urge you to Co-Sponsor H.R. 1135 and H.R. 1128, which provides advance appropriations authority for the Indian Health Service (IHS). This would provide timely and predictable funding to administer health programs and services to American Indian and Alaska Native people.

The 35 day partial government shutdown at the start of 2019 had a devastating impact the Indian health system. Tribes throughout the country reported rationed care, reduced services, and some facilities closed altogether. This reckless shutdown destabilized Native health delivery and health care provider access; as well as Tribal Governments, families, children and individuals. With the further likelihood of shutdowns and delayed federal appropriations, Tribes firmly believe that advanced appropriations for IHS will allow for greater planning, more efficient spending, and higher quality care for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) patients.

Since Fiscal Year 1998, appropriated funds for medical services and facilities through IHS have only been provided before the commencement of the new fiscal year once. Late funding has resulted in significant challenges to tribal and IHS programs in the areas of budgeting, recruitment and retention, provision of services, and facility maintenance and construction efforts, among other areas. Unreliable funding distributions create unnecessary work and additional expenses. The result is that Tribal health programs are left to make long-term decisions with only short-term money guaranteed. Often programs must determine whether and how they can enter into contracts with outside vendors and suppliers, plan programmatic activities, or maintain current personnel.



We believe that Indian Country deserves better. Funding for the Indian health system is a result of Treaties and other legal obligations made by the federal government with Indian Country and should not be held hostage each year to unrelated political battles. Adopting an advance appropriations process is one solution advocates are pursuing to assist Tribal and IHS facilities fiscally plan more efficiently.

Healthcare services directly administered by the federal government, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), are funded by advance appropriations to minimize the impact of late and, at times, inadequate budgets. The decision of Congress to enact advance appropriations for the VA medical program, and then the decision in 2014 to expand that authority at the VA, provides a compelling argument for the effectiveness of advance funding a federally administered health program, which could easily be applied to the IHS. Beyond the efficiency inherent to advance appropriations, providing timely and predictable funding helps ensure the federal government's Trust responsibility if carried out.

On behalf of Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indian, I strongly urge you to support this necessary legislation. Thank you for your time and please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or if additional information can be provided.

Sincerely,



Jamie Azure
Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians
Tribal Chairman



Nathan Davis
Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians
District I Councilman
Great Plains Tribal Chairman Health Board Representative



Patrick J. Marcellais
Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians
Health Board Chairman