



House Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs Holds a Hearing for Assistant Secretary of Indian Health Bill



Chairman Jeff Hurd opens first Subcommittee of Indian and Insular Affairs Hearing in 119th Congress.
Photo Courtesy of NNWO

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On February 05, 2025, the House Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs held a hearing titled *Legislative Hearing on: H.R. 410 (Rep. Begich), "Alaska Native Vietnam Era Veterans Land Allotment Extension Act of 2025"; H.R. 412 (Rep. Bergman), To authorize the Bay Mills Indian Community of the State of Michigan to convey land and interests in land owned by the Tribe; H.R. 504 (Rep. Gimenez), "Miccosukee Reserved Area Amendments Act"; and H.R. 741 (Rep. Stanton), "Stronger Engagement for Indian Health Needs Act of 2025"*. The witnesses invited to speak at the hearing were Mr. Nelson Angapak from the Alaska Federation of Natives, the president of the Bay Mills Indian Community Whitney Gravelle, Chairman Talbert Cypress, of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, and Interim CEO A.C. Locklear for the National Indian Health Board.

Each bill being considered held great importance to different tribes, but H.R. 741 proved to be particularly important for all tribes as it would reclassify the position of IHS Director to an Assistant Secretary position under the Department of Health and Human Services. If the

position of Director becomes that of Assistant Secretary, the new head of IHS would have hiring and firing authority when it comes to the Indian Health Services, which could theoretically address the staff shortages that plague IHS. Furthermore, by making IHS' concerns more visible, it would be possible to work with Congress to meet IHS' full monetary budget needs. While not outwardly disapproving of the bill, Chairman Hurd did mention his major concern was that the bill does not provide any tangible direction as to how the elevation would address the need.

The Ranking Member of the subcommittee, Teresa Leger Fernandez, spoke next and congratulated Chairman Hurd for his new position and stated her desire to work in bipartisan basis to help Indian Country and address historic injustices. Ranking Member Leger Fernandez expressed her concern about the funding freeze that occurred last week and how it affected Indian Country and continued her statement by stating firmly that tribal affairs are not part of the DEI Initiatives. She finished her statement by explaining that she believed that elevating the position of IHS Director would help raise awareness of the health issues in Indian Country to a higher level.

Congressman Jared Huffman, Ranking Member of the Natural Resources Committee, also attended the hearing and commented on how attacking equity was an attack against tribal sovereignty and expressed his concern regarding the funding freeze. Lastly, he mentioned how elevating the position of Director to Assistant Secretary was critically important, as it would help ensure that "the needs of tribal communities are at the forefront of national health policy decisions".

Currently, the bill remains in the Subcommittee of Indian and Insular Affairs, but the Navajo Nation Washington Office will keep monitoring Congress in order to see what the Subcommittee's next steps are regarding the bill.