

**Chairman Lisa A. Murkowski Opening Statement**  
**Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**  
**Hearing to Review the FY2020 Budget Request for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Indian Health Service**

**May 1, 2019**

*(As prepared for delivery)*

Good morning everyone. The hearing will come to order.

Today we will examine the FY 2020 budget request for the Indian Health Service (IHS). I want to thank Rear Admiral Michael Weahkee, Principle Deputy Director, for appearing before us today. The head of the Indian Health Service is a tough job, but a critical one so while we're here today, I am also hopeful the Senate will be sent a nomination for the IHS Director soon.

Accompanying Rear Admiral Weahkee is Rear Admiral Michael Toedt, Chief Medical Officer, Ann Church, the Acting Director for the Office of Finance and Accounting and Gary Hartz, the Director of the Office of Environmental Health and Engineering. Thank you all for being here today.

As a reminder, we'll call on members in the order they arrive, going back and forth between the majority and the minority. Each member will have five minutes for a round of questions. I'm hopeful to get through multiple rounds, but any outstanding questions may be submitted for the record.

The IHS budget request for FY 2020 is \$6 billion for programs within this subcommittee's jurisdiction. This is an increase of \$140 million or a 2.4% increase above the FY2019 enacted level. There are some bright spots in this year's budget proposal that appear to take steps to address important health concerns in our Native American and Alaska Native Communities and a few other areas where we need some additional information that hopefully we will get today.

The IHS budget proposes \$25M to focus on Hepatitis C and HIV, \$25M to support electronic health record modernization, fully funds contract support costs, and includes funding for the staffing packages for newly constructed health care facilities such as the Yakutat Tlingit Tribe Health Center. There is also a slight \$1.2 million increase for Sanitization Facilities construction, which is important to the state of Alaska.

While there are important increases in this budget and the agency's budget has less reductions than others we have seen in this Subcommittee's jurisdiction, I am concerned about the proposed \$78 million decrease for health care facilities when we know the total need for construction across Indian Country is estimated at \$14.5 billion. I also want to make sure we are using our resources efficiently and effectively to address the opioid epidemic, which has been especially acute for American Indians and Alaska Natives, and that we are making the right investments to help remove the agency from the GAO high risk list. I will explore these issues in more detail during time for questions, but there is one issue I must address before we proceed.

Sadly, we have had to address IHS issues we have learned about from the press over the last few years in these budget hearings. Unfortunately, the Wall Street Journal has become an annual reference point for us in this hearing. The most recent investigative report does not involve the Great Plains, but revealed how the agency mishandled and routinely transferred a now-convicted pedophile doctor,

Stanley Patrick Weber. Quite frankly, there are no words to describe the anger, disappointment, and empathy for the victims we must all feel. I hope to find out today exactly what is being done by the Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General, the White House Task Force, and the Indian Health Service to address this terrible situation. I want to go on record that I am requesting any and all policy recommendations that come out of the ongoing investigations. Our number one priority should be protecting our people, especially our children. This should come before anything else. I am eager to hear what steps are being taken to make sure this never happens again.

Admiral Weahkee, I look forward to your testimony and will now turn to Ranking Member Udall for any comments he would like to make.

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