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Dear Tribal Leader:

I am honored to write to you today as the Director of the Indian Health Service (IHS). The Senate confirmed my nomination on May 6, 2009, and I was sworn in on May 12, 2009. I am very much looking forward to working with all of you in this time of hope and change. I am also writing you to share my priority areas and to ask for your participation in the important national debate on health reform.

First, I would like to thank Mr. Robert McSwain for his service as the IHS Director. Mr. McSwain worked extremely hard to advance the mission of the IHS under challenging circumstances and I appreciate his efforts to improve healthcare services for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Priority Areas

While I am transitioning and getting settled over the next few weeks, I am quickly beginning to work on my priority areas, which include beginning conversations about improving our partnership with Tribes, bringing health reform to the Agency, improving quality of, and access to care, and ensuring that everything we do is transparent, accountable, fair, and inclusive.

In the coming weeks, you will hear more about the process for my first task, which is to listen. I plan to consult with Tribes about these priorities, as well as to listen and gather input from our IHS, Tribal, and Urban Indian health program healthcare providers and staff. I am looking forward to hearing from all of you about new and innovative ways we can accomplish our mission and goals. I hope this opportunity to look at what we are doing and find ways to improve will help increase both the confidence our patients have in us and the confidence of the Administration and Congress that any additional resources that come our way will be a good investment in improving the health of our communities. It is clear to me that, in order for us to gain the support we so very desperately need, we need to demonstrate a willingness to change and improve. The challenges we face are great, but I am confident we can find solutions together.

National Health Reform

As many of you know, the debate over national health reform is in full swing, and comprehensive health reform legislation may be introduced in Congress as early as June. While a number of options are being discussed, it appears that some of the changes under consideration—for example, those related to access to health insurance options and provider reimbursement—could directly affect components of the Indian health system, including IHS-operated, Tribal, and Urban Indian health programs, in a variety of ways.

In the context of the ongoing effort to enact national health reform, one of my priorities is to bring reform to the IHS. As I have mentioned, I believe it is clear that, in order for the IHS to gain the support it needs, we must demonstrate a willingness to change and improve. I am confident that we can work together to discuss many ways we can further our mission by improving how we do business and provide health care, including large-scale system changes that will take time to develop, as well as more limited solutions that we can implement immediately. And I know there are exciting success stories within individual programs and facilities that we can apply on a system-wide basis. I am looking forward to consulting with Tribes and gathering input on how we can reform and improve the IHS, and I know many of you are anxious to begin that conversation.

I want to be sure to distinguish between the internal reform we need to bring to the IHS over the coming months and the more comprehensive system reform currently under consideration in Congress. The President shares my goal of having the Indian health system at the table as part of that broader debate. With that in mind, I am partnering with HHS's Offices of Intergovernmental Affairs and Health Reform to plan for Secretary Sebelius to issue a formal call for Tribal Consultation on this issue as quickly as possible. This will allow the Department to hear from Tribes as it engages on this legislation. I am also proud of the efforts that are already underway at the Tribal level to discuss and make recommendations on national health reform.

In addition, I would like to hear from you about your thoughts and recommendations with respect to national health reform, and the ideas you think should be included in the reform effort in order to expand access and quality of care for our patients. I would encourage you to send these ideas and comments to our newly created Agency e-mail address, HEALTHREFORM@IHS.GOV by **Tuesday, June 30, 2009**. If you are interested in the progress of the many issues currently being debated nationally, please visit the Administration's Web site, www.healthreform.gov.

Finally, as I mentioned, we will soon begin the formal process of having a conversation with Tribes about how to bring internal reform to the IHS, and that I will keep you fully updated at each stage of the process. All of these efforts will help us further fulfill our obligation to elevating the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives by improving access to and quality of care for our patients.

Sincerely yours,

/Yvette Roubideaux/

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Director