



# BLACKFEET NATION

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June 7, 2023

Honorable Roselyn Tso  
Director, Indian Health Service  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, MT 20857

Dear Director Tso:

The Blackfeet Tribe understands you are scheduled to visit the Blackfeet Indian Reservation to meet with Indian Health Service and tribal leadership. Ordinarily we welcome a visit with someone in your position and remain a bit confused. As you know, we have been working relentlessly to secure a facility for the Blackfeet Indian Community promised by your predecessor. Our persistence has born little fruit: in the almost two years we have been able to conduct only two meetings: 1) A single in-person on February 10, 2023 and 2) a conference call on March 14, 2023. We hoped your upcoming visit marks a fresh start and that we can meet regularly and productively to accomplish the commitments IHS has made to our people.

Numerous emails, phone calls have been made to follow up on Indian Health Service's commitment regarding the Blackfeet Tribe's top issue with Indian Health Service:

- IHS's commitment to funding, building and constructing a youth wellness center on the Blackfeet Reservation, in order to mitigate the damage caused by former Indian Health Service pediatrician, Stanley Weber, a convicted felon for sex offenses against children, many of whom were citizens of the Blackfeet Tribe.

We hoped that a meeting would reflect the time and care justice for our children deserves. But we are concerned about previous limiting and minimizing statements by IHS staff. On at least four times from three staffers of IHS, the Blackfeet Leadership was told there was a "hard stop" at 30 minutes. After the initial in-person meeting, you made a commitment to immediately

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scheduling a follow up call to discuss the Tribe's facility and to work with your staff, specifically Terri Schmidt. We deeply appreciated your sense of urgency. As a follow up, the Blackfeet Tribe had sought support from IHS to be included in the Fiscal Year 2024 Health & Human Services/Indian Health Service Budget Proposal for President Biden.

More than a month went by and rather than embracing a line-item for the youth facility, IHS seemed to shift to an avoidance strategy, indicating that IHS already funds a youth facility in every region, including the Rocky Mountain Region. We had to correct the facts and remind IHS that there is no youth facility in the Rocky Mountain Region.

In what you explained as a consolation, you promoted the IHS grant program and explained the 10-year waiting list. You encouraged the Blackfeet Tribe to apply. You also asserted that IHS already provided the Tribe information after the in-person meeting in February. Again, our attorney had to correct you because your staff had not provided critical information regarding IHS Facilities Advisory Board, Facilities List and IHS Small Ambulatory Program.

IHS's budget submission as part of President Biden's Budget did not reflect IHS's commitment to fund a facility for the Blackfeet Tribe. In corresponding with our federal delegation, Congressman Zinke's and Senator Tester's and Senator Daines' expectation was that your office would work with the Blackfeet Tribe to have a budget to reflect the IHS's commitment to fund a facility.

Director Tso, we were heartened by your statements at your confirmation hearing and many hearing since, where you stated your commitment to fulfill the trust responsibility of providing quality healthcare in collaboration with Indian tribes. But despite those good words, we feel that, to date, you have failed the Blackfeet Tribe. You have failed to engage with the Blackfeet Tribe at a meaningful level, leaving the Tribe to pursue funding through other avenues to secure funding for a facility to address the healthcare and safety needs of the Blackfeet Community. You have ignored that the Blackfeet Tribe forewent litigation to seek resources and justice for our youth based on the commitments of your predecessor in Council chambers to make it right by providing the safe place and resources our youth have never had. We have lost youth to suicide as a direct result of IHS intentionally foisting a known child predator upon them. Giving our youth a place to heal seems like a small justice. We do not understand your efforts to continue to evade this solemn obligation and your failure to simply follow through on IHS' promise.

Personal calls apologizing for failing to follow up on calls and provide information are empty and are reminiscent of countless other examples of the broken treaties and promises the U.S. Federal Government continues to peddle as an attempt to atone for the land loss and lives lost.

The Blackfeet has a "hard stop" with lip service. We feel your visit would be hollow and not for the purpose of moving a youth facility forward for the Blackfeet Tribe. The Blackfeet leadership believes it best the travel funds from IHS could be put to better use for Indian Tribes across the United States to discuss statistics and efforts to fill vacancies. Again, we don't understand the purpose for your visit and we don't want to waste our time or yours.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Scott Kipp". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "K".

Scott "Illiff" Kipp  
Chairman of the Blackfeet