



COALITION OF LARGE TRIBES

Blackfeet Nation • Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe • Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation of Oregon • Crow Creek Sioux Tribe • Crow Nation
Eastern Shoshone Tribe • Fort Belknap Indian Community • Hopi Tribe • Mandan, Hidatsa & Arikara Nation • Mescalero Apache Tribe
Muscogee (Creek) Nation • Navajo Nation • Northern Arapaho Tribe • Northern Cheyenne Tribe • Rosebud Sioux Tribe
San Carlos Apache Tribe • Shoshone-Bannock Tribes • Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation
Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe • Spirit Lake Nation • Spokane Tribe • Standing Rock Sioux Tribe • Ute Indian Tribe
Ute Mountain Ute Tribe • Walker River Paiute Tribe

June 2, 2026

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Committee on Indian Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Vice Chairman
Committee on Indian Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Request for Prompt Hearing on the Nomination of Mark Cruz to Serve as Director of the Indian Health Service

Chairman Murkowski and Vice Chairman Schatz:

On behalf of the Coalition of Large Tribes (COLT), write to express our strongest possible support for the nomination of Mark Cruz to serve as Director of the Indian Health Service (IHS). We respectfully request that the Committee schedule a hearing on his nomination at the earliest possible date following the White House’s announcement yesterday. As you know, I am the Chairman of COLT—an intertribal organization representing the interests of the more than 50 tribes with the largest land bases (reservations of 100,000 acres or more), encompassing more than 95% of Indian Country lands and more than half the Native American population. COLT is a unified advocacy base for large land base tribes and we agree that Mark Cruz is a fantastic experienced public servant whose leadership we need at IHS as soon as possible.

Mr. Cruz is widely known and highly regarded by tribal nations across Indian Country. He brings a deep understanding of federal Indian policy and a demonstrated commitment to tribal sovereignty, access to services and resources, infrastructure and economic development, and culturally-grounded leadership. From the early days of the current Administration, Mr. Cruz has been a staunch advocate for tribes at HHS, serving as a senior counselor to Secretary Kennedy.

In his current role as Senior Advisor to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Mr. Cruz has demonstrated significant leadership on federal Indian health budgeting and infrastructure priorities. He has helped advance proposals for advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service in the President’s FY 2027 budget, a longstanding priority for tribal nations to ensure funding stability and certainty.



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He has also played a key role in supporting major federal investments in IHS health care infrastructure, including a \$1 billion commitment to facility construction and modernization, addressing one of the most urgent needs in the Indian health system.

Advocacy for tribes is nothing new for Mr. Cruz. From 2018 through 2020, Mr. Cruz served as Deputy Assistant Secretary—Indian Affairs for Policy and Economic Development (DAS-PED) at the U.S. Department of the Interior, where he led efforts central to tribal self-determination and economic growth.

Mr. Cruz’s experience also includes service on Capitol Hill, where he served as Chief of Staff to Representative Todd Rokita (R-IN) from 2017 to 2018 and as a legislative staff member from 2014 to 2017, following earlier service as a legislative fellow in the office of Representative Tom Cole (R-OK). These roles provided him with substantial experience in appropriations, oversight, and federal policymaking affecting tribal nations.

Importantly, Mr. Cruz brings a personal connection to Indian Country. A citizen of the Klamath Tribes of Oregon, as a Teach For America alum, he taught at St. Francis Indian High School—a Bureau of Indian Education tribal grant school on the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation—where he earned Teacher of the Year honors for 2011–2012. This experience reflects his lifelong direct engagement with tribal communities and his commitment to service.

His career reflects not only a sophisticated understanding of federal budgeting processes, but also a clear recognition—grounded in his engagement with tribal nations—that modern facilities and predictable funding are essential to improving health outcomes in Indian Country. Tribal health organizations have credited Mr. Cruz with elevating these priorities at the highest levels of HHS and strengthening coordination between the Department and tribal nations.

Mr. Cruz is deeply respectful of tribal religious practices, governance systems, and cultural traditions. He is known for his dedication, candor, and exceptional work ethic, and he is widely respected by tribal leaders who value his accessibility and steadfast support for tribal sovereignty and culture. His expertise in economic development further strengthens his ability to address the underlying social determinants of health that impact tribal communities.

The Indian Health Service plays a central role in fulfilling the federal government’s Trust and Treaty obligations. Strong and capable leadership is urgently needed to address longstanding



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disparities in health care access, workforce shortages, and infrastructure deficits across Indian Country. Mr. Cruz’s experience at the Department of the Interior, on Capitol Hill, and at HHS positions him to lead IHS with both urgency and effectiveness.

We also appreciate his deep appreciation for food sovereignty, and particularly for bison as a pivotal food resource supporting national security. Like Secretary Kennedy, Mr. Cruz knows that if the United States went to war with a foreign power, we would struggle to feed ourselves. Bison are far more resilient than cattle and require no vaccines, antibiotics, pesticide-laden grains, or human calving assistance. Bison are central to the healthy diets of many COLT member tribes and we look forward to Mr. Cruz’s help restoring and growing tribal food systems and supporting local control of the food supply, including working with the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture supporting tribal grasslands economies which feed our people and strengthen our tribal nations.

COLT also lauds his deep understanding of behavioral health and trauma healing. Indian Country needs both, and more resources and inclusion in the historic silos of HHS that have never served tribal governments well—CDC, CMS, SAMSHA, etc. Mr. Cruz is the person who can build connections and transcend outmoded ways of thinking, respecting traditional, cultural medicine and tribal lifeways. He is a leader and a collaborator. He is exactly the leader tribes need at IHS.

Given the importance of this role and the immediate needs across the Indian health system, COLT respectfully urges the Committee to act expeditiously and schedule a confirmation hearing as soon as possible. Timely consideration of this nomination will help ensure continuity of leadership and sustained progress on critical priorities for tribal nations.

We appreciate your continued leadership on issues affecting Indian Country and stand ready to work with the Committee, the Administration and Mr. Cruz as IHS Director to advance the health and well-being of tribal nations. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Signed by:


J. Garret Renville, Chairman, Coalition of Large Tribes;
Chairman, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse
Reservation, South Dakota