



AUG 13 2009

Dear Tribal Leader:

I am writing to request your input on how to improve the Indian Health Service (IHS) Tribal consultation process.

In my Senate confirmation speech, I indicated that my first priority was to renew and strengthen our partnership with Tribes. I understand the important role of Tribal consultation in the relationship between the federal government and Tribes. I believe in order to improve the health of our communities, we must work in partnership with them. This partnership is vital to the implementation of IHS programs and initiatives.

Since I have been the Director, I have heard from many tribal leaders of the need to improve our Tribal consultation process and the importance of making this process more meaningful. Tribal leaders have shared with me both their support of the existing consultation process, as well as their concerns. Many Tribal leaders have indicated that the IHS Tribal consultation policy is in general a good policy; however, many have indicated that there could be some improvements in the process or in the ways that we conduct Tribal consultation.

IHS has conducted Tribal consultation in a variety of ways over the years on a one-time basis for particular issues or on a regular basis for ongoing initiatives. Various approaches have been used to support this process, including direct correspondence to Tribal leadership, meetings with Tribal leadership at the local, Area or national levels, and/or a variety of standing and ad hoc Tribal advisory groups.

We also recognize that tribal consultation may be taking up an increasing part of your time these days. In addition to all the tribal consultation meetings and workgroups for IHS, we know that you also must participate in tribal consultation meetings and workgroups for other agencies, departments, or even states, as well as the important work you do with national and regional tribal organizations. Some tribal leaders have expressed a concern that the demands of all the various consultation activities are growing and negatively impacting their standing with their own communities given all the time and travel required away from home. Perhaps you have some creative ideas for how to change or reorganize our activities related to tribal consultation so that tribes can participate in a meaningful manner without imposing a huge time and travel burden. We want to work with you on improving the process for tribal consultation. While I am not proposing a change to the current IHS tribal consultation policy, I have attached the current policy for your review as you consider how we can improve how we implement this policy.

Please e-mail your comments and ideas on how to improve IHS' Tribal consultation process to consultation@ihs.gov, by Monday, September 28, 2009.

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I plan to convene a group of elected Tribal officials to review and discuss your input on this topic and to work with me to come up with recommendations to improve Tribal consultation within the IHS. I would like this group to include two (2) elected tribal officials from each IHS Area, with at least one of the representatives from each Area having experience as a Chair or member of an existing IHS standing or ad hoc tribal advisory committee, board, or workgroup. I have enclosed a list of the current IHS Tribal advisory committees/workgroups for your information. Because I would like to convene this group in October, I am requesting that your nominations be submitted to Area Directors no later than Monday, September 21, 2009. Please only submit names of elected tribal officials; it is important that this discussion happen at the government to government level. Area Directors will provide me with nominations by Thursday, September 24, 2009.

Thank you in advance for your input on how to improve the IHS Tribal consultation process. I look forward to reviewing your ideas and working with you to renew and strengthen our partnership to improve the health of our communities.

Sincerely,

/Yvette Roubideaux/

Yvette Roubideaux, M.D., M.P.H.
Director

Enclosures: IHS Tribal Consultation Policy
IHS Tribal Advisory Committee/Workgroup List