

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
INTELLIGENCE
JOINT ECONOMIC

November 17, 2020

Rear Admiral Michael D. Weahkee
Director
Indian Health Service
5600 Fishers Land
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Rear Admiral Weahkee,

I write today to condemn the Indian Health Service's (IHS) decision to decrease essential services at the Acoma-Canoncito-Laguna (ACL) Hospital. ACL's benefit to the Pueblo of Acoma and the surrounding community cannot be underscored. As the only hospital between Grants and Albuquerque on Interstate-40, ACL serves as a lifeline for the health and safety of this community, which is only amplified during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. I continue to acknowledge and support the Pueblo of Laguna's right to contract their own health services; however, providing uninterrupted and full capacity hospital services at ACL should remain a top priority for IHS during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Pueblo of Acoma has seen a spike in COVID-19 cases. Over a matter of weeks, cases on the Pueblo went from zero in September to 100 in early November. With the recent suspension of emergency services and inpatient care at ACL, the community must now drive one hour or longer to hospitals in Grants or Albuquerque that are already reaching capacity.

In response to the abrupt halt in services at ACL in the face of surging virus infections, the Governor of Acoma has had to implement a state of emergency.

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected tribal communities, in part due to a lack of environmental and public health infrastructure. IHS' actions with ACL only compound this. In 2019, ACL served 90,000 patients. IHS' actions will now leave many of these patients without the care they need, in the midst of a deadly and vicious pandemic.

IHS' lack of appropriate consultations with the Pueblo and the sudden reduction of services is unprincipled and unnecessarily puts lives in tribal communities at risk. I respectfully request that you reverse the decision to suspend emergency services and inpatient care at ACL and I implore

you to reexamine alternate funding avenues for sustaining vital healthcare services, including the emergency funding that Congress has allocated to IHS for COVID-19 response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Martin Heinrich', is written over a horizontal line.

MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senator