

United States Senate

March 13, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20210

Dear Secretary Azar:

I write to you concerning the current pandemic COVID-19 and the Indian Health Service (IHS) and their actions concerning the virus. I write to express my concern over the ability for tribal members to receive the testing and care they require to protect their communities.

As you are aware, COVID-19 is an ongoing pandemic that has the ability to spread extremely rapidly and has a relatively high mortality rate. I want to ensure IHS has the ability to provide the necessary healthcare to combat this virus as this remains a high priority to the administration and my office. You must work with every federal health agency and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), along with their state and local counterpart to ensure that tribal members are not adversely affected by this pandemic. Tribes have a unique situation that require special attention and federal support.

COVID-19 has the potential to be particularly damaging to tribal communities due to their unique living situations. Tribes like the newly recognized Little Shell Tribe in Montana need the assistance of the Federal Government to deal with an emergency such as this. This is their first emergency since becoming a federally recognized tribe and they will need help navigating the federal bureaucracy to access the resources they will need. Please take special and swift consideration to all tribal emergency declarations and request for federal assistance during this time of need.

I hope the Department will take swift action to bring test kits and federal resources to Indian Country. I look forward to working with you to protect our tribes during this emergency.

Sincerely,


STEVE DAINES
United States Senator

cc: Administrator Gaynor, FEMA
RADM Weahkee, IHS