

Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Advances Nomination of Roselyn Tso as Director of IHS, Awaits Full Senate Consideration

Category: Policy Blog

written by Jennifer Wendling | August 18, 2022

On May 25, 2022, the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs (SCIA) met to consider the nomination of Roselyn Tso as Director of the Indian Health Service (IHS) who was [nominated](#) by President Biden in March. After the resignation of Rear Admiral Michael Weahkee in January of 2021, IHS is currently led by interim Acting Director Liz Fowler. On July 13, 2022, SCIA voted to advance the nomination of Ms. Tso in a business meeting after she appeared before the Committee for her [nomination hearing in May](#). Her nomination now awaits full consideration by the Senate.

Roselyn Tso: Background and Experience

Ms. Tso is a citizen of the Navajo Nation. She began working for IHS in 1984 and currently serves as the Director of the Navajo Area, the largest IHS regional area. Prior to her work in IHS, much of her professional career was spent in Portland, where she served in several capacities, including working with the three urban programs in the Portland Area that provide services ranging from community health to comprehensive primary health care services.

SCIA Hearing: Confirmation Needed to Address Health Disparities & Tribal Needs

The absence of a confirmed IHS Director has prevented Tribes, Tribal organizations, and urban Indian organizations (UIOs) from addressing the health care needs of their Native American populations, which directly falls under the responsibility of IHS. Since the resignation of Rear Admiral Weahkee, there have been countless requests from Indian Country calling on Congress and the Administration to nominate a new IHS director to address the growing health disparities experienced by American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs). The National Council of Urban Indian Health has previously [stressed](#) the importance of appointing a permanent IHS Director and called for the elevation of the role to Assistant Secretary.

During the [SCIA hearing](#) to consider her nomination as Director of IHS, Ms. Tso highlighted how Native communities have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, which has been made worse given the absence of a confirmed Director. She stated, "I am reminded of the many health disparities facing American Indians and Alaskan Natives – health disparities that in many cases were made worse by COVID-19. For example, sadly, today, too many Navajo families still do not have access to running water in their homes. Access to clean, safe drinking water is essential to the health and well-being of our people."

In addition, Ms. Tso stated during the hearing that she intends to utilize IHS resources to not only address the disparities caused by COVID-19, but to also "improve the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health and well-being of all American Indians and Alaskan Natives served by the Agency." To achieve this goal, Ms. Tso said she would prioritize strengthening and streamlining business operations to create a more unified health care system, develop centralized systems to improve patient outcomes, accountability, and transparency, and finally address the needs and challenges experienced by the workforce. To conclude her testimony, Ms. Tso said that if confirmed as the Director of IHS, she would update agency policies and programs, as well as utilize the oversight

authority of IHS to best serve each Tribal community.

As of August 16, 2022, there have been no updates on the anticipated date for the full Senate consideration for the nomination of Ms. Tso as Director of IHS, which would be the last step in her confirmation process.

Next Steps

NCUIH will continue to monitor and provide updates on the full Senate consideration of the nomination of Ms. Tso as Director of IHS.