

House Appropriations Subcommittee examines IHS Fiscal Year 2026 Budget, Bipartisan Lawmakers Defend Stable Funding for IHS

Category: Policy Blog

written by River Carroll | June 11, 2025

On June 5, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies held a hearing where Acting Indian Health Service (IHS) Director Benjamin Smith and Chief Financial Officer Jillian Curtis testified on the [President's Fiscal Year 2026 budget request for IHS](#), which notably does not include advance appropriations. Members from both sides of the aisle expressed commitment to retain advanced appropriations for IHS. Questions covered support for deepened urban consultation, staffing needed for the June 2026 electronic health record launch, and continued investment in the Special Diabetes Program for Indians and related food-as-medicine pilots.

Hearing Highlights

The discussion covered core operational challenges and featured direct reference to an Urban Indian Organization (UIO) in Utah. Below are the main points raised by members and witnesses.



- **Advanced Appropriations for IHS:** Bipartisan support for advance appropriations was clear. Members from both parties emphasized that advance appropriations remain essential for keeping IHS hospitals and clinics open during funding lapses like government shutdowns. House Appropriations Chairman Tom Cole (Chickasaw, R-OK-04) reiterated his support, saying, “One thing I can assure you, we didn’t get here to give it up; Congress will keep advance appropriations in place,” despite its omission from the FY 2026 request.
- **Urban Indian Organization Services:** Rep. Celeste Maloy (R-UT-02) praised the Urban Indian Center of Salt Lake and asked how Congress can bolster urban Native health; Director Smith cited stronger consultation and issue-tracking, including UIO feedback.
- **Electronic Health Record modernization:** Chair Simpson (R-ID-02) asked whether the new Oracle-Cerner platform will turn on in June 2026; Director Smith confirmed the schedule and acknowledged that “about fifty specialized positions remain open” and that IHS staffing is “still hovering near thirty percent vacant.” If vacancies persist, Ranking Member Chellie Pingree (D-ME-01) pressed for contingency plans.
- **Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI):** Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN-04) highlighted the fact that eighty percent of SDPI grants now target youth prevention, calling the program “a model the rest of public health should copy.” Members from both parties applauded complementary “food-as-medicine” pilots such as Produce Prescription.
- **Workforce Pipeline:** Ranking Member Chellie Pingree (D-ME-01) urged IHS to widen its scholarship and loan-repayment programs by co-funding new rural residency rotations with the Veterans Health Administration and HRSA. Smith said the inter-agency task force is “standing up the first joint primary-care rotations for 2026 graduates” and will report back on early recruitment data.

What’s Next

House Interior Appropriations will propose their budget on the June 23 subcommittee markup and the June 26 full committee markup.

Background

Read our full analysis of the proposed budget: [ANALYSIS: President Trump Proposes Increase for Indian Health Service, Stable Funding for Urban Indian Health for FY 2026](#)