

IHS Chief of Staff Clayton Fulton Assumes Acting Director Role During Leadership Transition

Category: Policy Blog

written by Meredith Raimondi | December 3, 2025

On December 2, 2025, the Indian Health Service (IHS) announced that Clayton Fulton, Chief of Staff for IHS, will assume all delegable authorities, duties, and functions of the IHS director as the agency in the absence of confirmed director. This delegation was made by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr and will remain in place while the IHS director position continues to be vacant. At this time, the Administration has not submitted a nominee for the director position.

It was also announced that as part of the leadership shift, Benjamin Smith will return to his role as deputy director, and Darrell LaRoche will resume his position as deputy director for management operations. Additionally, Dr. Rose Weahkee concludes her service in an acting leadership capacity. Fulton expressed sincere gratitude for the dedication and leadership demonstrated by each of these individuals, especially during a time marked by significant responsibility. He also extended appreciation for their steadfast commitment to the agency and Tribal Nations.

Fulton emphasized that the mission of the Indian Health Service remains strong and unchanged. "We remain fully committed to upholding the government-to-government relationship and ensuring continuity of services and operations across the Indian health system. The work of raising the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level continues to guide every decision we make," Fulton stated.

A citizen of the Cherokee Nation, Fulton holds a Juris Doctor from the University of Michigan Law School and an MBA from Northeastern State University. He reaffirmed his dedication to maintaining transparency, partnership, and open communication throughout the transition. "You have my commitment that IHS will maintain transparency, partnership, and open communication throughout this period. I look forward to continuing our work together to advance tribal health priorities and to support the delivery of high-quality, culturally grounded care across all our service areas," he said.

Read more:

<https://www.ihs.gov/newsroom/pressreleases/2025-press-releases/ihs-chief-of-staff-clayton-fulton-assumes-delegable-duties-of-agency-director/>