Senators Cortez Masto and Rounds Introduce NCUIH-Endorsed Bipartisan Bill to Elevate Indian Health Service Leadership Within HHS

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On February 3rd, 2026, U.S. Senators Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) and Mike Rounds (R-SD) introduced bipartisan legislation to elevate the Director of the Indian Health Service (IHS) to Assistant Secretary for Indian Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Companion legislation was introduced in the House of Representatives by Congressmen Greg Stanton (D-Ariz.-04) and David Joyce (R-Ohio-14).

The *Stronger Engagement for Indian Health Needs Act* would formally elevate the IHS Director's position within the federal government, strengthening Tribal representation in federal health decision-making and reinforcing the federal government's trust responsibility to provide health care to American Indian and Alaska Native people.

"The shockingly unequal health outcomes in Indian Country paint a clear picture: our country has failed to live up to our obligation to provide quality health care for Tribal communities," **said Senator Cortez Masto**. "This bipartisan legislation would be an important step toward giving IHS the tools and authority it needs to ensure everyone has access to excellent, affordable health care."

"The Indian Health Service has an obligation to care for tribal members across the United States, and we have an obligation to make improvements to the system to improve patient care," **said Senator Rounds**. "Our legislation would raise the role of IHS Director to Assistant Secretary for Indian Health, allowing them more authority to recruit and retain staff within the IHS system."

"Effective healthcare delivery requires empowered leadership, and elevating the IHS Director to Assistant Secretary is a critical step in moving Indian health from an afterthought to a primary focus of federal healthcare policy," **said Francys Crevier (Algonquin), CEO of NCUIH**.