

Testimony of Lillian A. Sparks
Nominee for the Commissioner of Administration for Native Americans
Department of Health and Human Services
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Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

Good morning Chairman Dorgan, Vice Chairman Barrasso and members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. My name is Lillian Sparks. I am an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe and descendent of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and I humbly come before you today as the President's nominee to be the Commissioner for the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

I was honored when the President nominated me to the position of Commissioner for Administration for Native Americans this past October, and believe my experiences have prepared me well to assume the responsibilities of this important position. Currently, I serve as the executive director of the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), where I lead the efforts of the membership and Board of Directors on education issues impacting American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities. I have also worked as a staff attorney for the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), where I focused on issues relating to tribal governments and youth and families, including health care, early childhood education, international indigenous human rights and religious protection.

I wish to serve as the Commissioner of ANA because I believe in the goals of self-sufficiency and cultural preservation established at ANA, and because I share this Administration's support for increasing and strengthening services for youth and families. It would be my honor to assist in implementing the President's agenda for tribal communities, including economic and infrastructure development, early childhood education, language preservation, and the principles of tribal self-determination, tribal consultation, and tribal inclusion.

I am a strong believer in "service leadership" and strive to practice service to others over self interest. Raised in my traditional Lakota values of wisdom, bravery, fortitude, and generosity, I was taught to lead by action, with humility, and not merely provide direction. If confirmed, I would commit myself to a number of priorities to strengthen the Department's programs. These priorities include:

- Promoting the ANA's priorities and initiatives in Indian Country to ensure that tribal communities are aware of new grant opportunities at the Department;
- Strengthening the Intra-Departmental Council on Native American Affairs at HHS to ensure that Secretary is well informed on issues and best practices in Indian country as it relates to HHS;
- Collaborating with tribal governments and other stakeholders to provide increased services to ANA grantees and applicants through increased technical assistance, useful program evaluations, and convenings (trainings, conventions, etc.) as feasible;
- Strengthening the relationship between ANA and Congress through frequent communication and the development of shared policy priorities; and
- Continuing to foster the development of stable and diversified tribal economies, increase the prevalence of use of Native languages, and support programs that

promote the well-being of Native youth and families.

I am a firm believer in accountability and integrity in the work of any organization that has stakeholders or membership. It is incredibly important to identify performance goals to measure progress and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided. If confirmed, I will ensure that regulations developed by ANA follow the tribal consultation policies set forth by HHS and that all stakeholders receive adequate and prompt notification to participate in both the consultations and comment periods. Additionally, if confirmed, I pledge to implement and adhere to a system that allocates discretionary spending in an open manner through a set of fair and objective established criteria.

I will also work closely with the committees of jurisdiction in Congress, including the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, to ensure that the regulations are aligned with Congressional intent. I will work collaboratively with Congress and the Committee staff through open and frequent dialogue, information sharing, and meetings to ensure that the policies and regulations promulgated by the department/agency are not counteractive to the intent of the law and work cohesively with legislative provisions to address or strengthen tribal programs.

I believe that my lifelong career in public service coupled with my extensive experience in policy formulation impacting youth and children in tribal communities qualifies me for the appointment of ANA Commissioner. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the members of this Committee to provide essential services to Native American communities across the country.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.