

TESTIMONY OF ROSELYN TSO
BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
MAY 25, 2022

Chairman Schatz, Vice Chairman Murkowski, and members of the Committee, thank you for considering my nomination to be the Director of the Indian Health Service (IHS). I am honored by President Biden's decision to nominate me for this role, and, if confirmed, look forward to serving American Indians and Alaskan Natives under his leadership and Secretary Becerra's.

Before I begin my testimony, I would like to properly introduce myself in Navajo: My name is Roselyn Tso, I am Deeschii'nii – Start of the Red Streak People, born for the Hashk'aa hadzohi – Yucca Fruit Strung Out, my maternal grandfather is Tlogi Dine,e – Zia Pueblo, and my paternal grandfather is Tli zi Lani – Many Goat. I would also like to recognize and thank my family. Seated behind me today is my sister, Delores Tso-Robinson, her husband, Kenneth Robinson, my son, Edward Lyons, Jr., and my partner of more than 30 years, Mr. Cory Winnie. And watching virtually is my mother, Margie Tso, my brother, Lawrence Tso, and my children, Holly, Clayton, and Roberta, as well as members of my extended family, relatives, and friends. With me in spirit includes my father, the late Reverend Alvin Tso and my brothers, Ben, Willard, Alvin Jr., Eldon, and my sister, Linda. I would not be here today without their love and support.

My father's own service as a proud but quiet Korean War veteran continues to inspire me to serve at IHS and if confirmed, I would be honored to continue this public service.

I have almost four decades of professional experience working at all levels of IHS. I also have decades of lived experience as a member of the Navajo Nation who has had to navigate the services provided by the Agency for myself, family, and friends. Because of both my professional and personal experiences, I understand how patients experience the system and where we need to focus to improve patient experience and health outcomes.

If confirmed as the Director of the Indian Health Service, I will work to maximize the Agency's resources to improve the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health and well-being of all American Indians and Alaskan Natives served by the Agency. This is particularly important as we are more than two years into a pandemic that has disproportionately affected Indian Country.

Currently, I am the Director of the Navajo Area, the largest IHS regional area, where I am responsible for managing more than 4,000 employees and leading a budget of nearly \$1 billion. When I travel across the region to different IHS facilities, 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.

Throughout my career at IHS, I have worked to improve the Agency to better meet the needs of the people we serve. This was most evident throughout the pandemic, where I saw and was part of a true partnership with the Navajo Nation, San Juan Paiute Tribes, and federal, state, local, and private partners to collectively combat COVID-19.

If confirmed as the Director of IHS, I would prioritize the following:

- Strengthening and streamlining IHS' business operations to better support the delivery of health care by creating a more unified health care system that delivers the highest quality of care.
 - This requires using the latest technology to develop centralized systems to improve patient outcomes.
- Developing systems to improve accountability, transparency, and patient safety.
 - This requires updating many of the Agency's policies and programs and using its oversight authority to ensure these policies and programs are implemented as intended to best serve Tribal communities.
- Addressing the workforce needs and challenges to provide quality and safe care.
 - Each year, IHS loses too many skilled and experienced employees and struggles to replace them with qualified staff. IHS must improve its recruitment and retention efforts, enhance support and training for its workforce, and institute a robust succession plan to reduce employee turnover and ensure stability.

We cannot achieve any of this without strong partnerships and communication with our Tribal partners. As a result of my professional and personal experiences, I have a deep appreciation of Tribes and the needs of their communities. Each tribe has unique needs, and those needs cannot be met if you do not understand them.

The health care provided at IHS is critical for those we serve. I understand this not just because I work there. My family relies on IHS. My friends rely on IHS. *I* rely on the IHS. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing to be a voice for Tribal communities during this unprecedented time, as well as continuing the transformative work that is needed to meet their health care needs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions.