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Health and Human Services Hold Roundtable

Department Secretary and senior staff seek input from Native Nations and Organizations

WASHINGTON, D.C. (November 3) – Improving healthcare and strengthening partnerships with tribes were the focus of a meeting held between tribal leaders and U.S. Secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Kathleen Sebelius today.

Navajo Nation Division of Health Executive Director Anslem Roanhorse and Navajo Nation Council Health and Social Services Committee members Jerry Freddie and Evelyn Acothley attended the listening session.

“The health disparities our Navajo people face are significant,” said Council Delegate Acothley. “Remote and isolated communities have limited access to care. Many communities also have inadequate sanitation facilities. These are real issues the Navajo people face.”

Reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA), the need for national healthcare reform, and IHS streamlining in health care delivery were discussed and presented to Secretary Sebelius as recommendations to improve healthcare for the Navajo people

“Increasing access to quality healthcare and building new healthcare facilities which have been on the priority list for decades is crucial to improving the wellness of the Navajo people,” said Director Roanhorse. “Many of our people, especially elders and veterans, live in very remote areas. It is important that we increase access to healthcare, make reforms to Indian Health Care, and preserve the system accounts for isolation, user population size, and disease burden for IHS facilities construction.”

On Friday, October 30, President Obama signed the Department of Interior Appropriations bill, which contained a \$4 billion increase for American Indian and Alaska Native healthcare.

“The 13 percent increase over the 2009 budget is the largest increase in 20 years,” said Secretary Sebelius. “We think this is an important first step. President Obama feels strongly

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that this needs to be fulfilled and DHHS takes that responsibility seriously.”

Included in the increased funding for Indian Health Service is \$304 million for contract health service and information technology.

“We are not satisfied with status quo,” said Secretary Sebelius. “We must do better. We see this as a starting place for conversation and an important threshold” for the first year of the Obama Administration.

DHHS provides direct healthcare services and oversees several programs, such as the Indian Health Service, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Child Welfare Services, Aging, Child Care, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

The DHHS meeting with tribal leaders is among the first roundtables held before President Barack Obama’s White House Tribal Nations Conference on Thursday with leaders from 564 federally recognized tribes.

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