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May 26, 2020

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman
Committee on Energy & Commerce
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Diana DeGette
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Chairwoman DeGette,

Recent reports indicate that the Indian Health Service (IHS) issued a \$3 million contract to a former White House employee to deliver Chinese-made respiratory masks to facilities on the Navajo Nation, but the masks the company delivered are not as specified in the contract or are unsuitable for medical use.¹ As you know from my requests for assistance in supplying water, the Navajo Nation has the highest Coronavirus infection rate in the country.

While the need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is unprecedented across the country, it has been even more pronounced in the IHS system, which has been understaffed and under-resourced. This lack of attention to the needs of Native Americans and the Navajo is a clear violation of the treaty and trust obligations that the United States owe to the Navajo Nation. It is wholly unacceptable for the government to be delivering anything other than what is needed to any community, much less a vulnerable community.

I am similarly concerned that the IHS is issuing contracts to former government employees who attempted to manipulate retirement regulations during their federal service with no regard for their ability to deliver the goods agreed upon.

Accordingly, I ask that, as Chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee and Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, respectfully, you assist me conducting a thorough and comprehensive strategy to ensure that the IHS is contracting appropriately in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom O'Halleran".

Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress

¹ <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/499265-former-white-house-aide-won-3-million-contract-to-supply-masks-amid> & <https://www.propublica.org/article/the-feds-gave-a-former-white-house-official-3-million-to-supply-masks-to-navajo-hospitals-some-may-not-work>