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National Doctor's Day Statement "Keeping a Nation Healthy"

by

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Every day doctors across the nation care for the sick, promote good health, and help advance medical knowledge. March 30 is National Doctor's Day, a day when we can all take the opportunity to consider the contributions physicians have made to our personal health and to the health of our families.

March 30, 1842, is the date when Dr. Crawford W. Long, a Georgia physician, first used ether anesthesia in surgery. Since 1933 this date has been observed as Doctor's Day. In 1990 President George Bush signed into law a resolution officially proclaiming March 30th of each year as National Doctor's Day.

The history of the Indian Health Service is filled with the accomplishments of physicians who have tirelessly helped to raise the health status of American Indians and Alaska Natives and have influenced the health of citizens from nations around the world. The physicians who serve Indian communities are not your average doctors—they demonstrate an exceptional dedication to the communities they serve. Their spouses also demonstrate this same dedication in their willingness to support those who serve in our locations throughout the nation.

Our physicians invest extensive time in the clinical care that they provide in our hospitals and clinics, in addition to making home and community visits. Their hard work and dedication are reflected in the accreditation record of our hospitals and clinics, which is outstanding for rural America. Their commitment is also demonstrated through the mentoring that they provide to community members who have an interest in pursuing health careers.

In the past year we have said farewell to the first Director of the Indian Health Service, Dr. James Ray Shaw, and the second Director, Dr. Carruth J. Wagner. We also celebrated the 8-year tenure of Dr. Michael H. Trujillo, the fifth Director of the agency, who led the agency with the distinction established by his predecessors and elevated the prominence of Tribal governments and urban Indian organizations in the health programs of the people we serve. And a recent example of the caliber of physicians in our Indian health system is Dr. Eric Ossowski, a family practice physician at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center who has been recognized as Arizona's 2003 Family Physician of the Year by the Arizona Academy of Family Physicians.

The doctors across the nation deserve our recognition and appreciation for their contributions to the health of the nation. And to the doctors of the Indian Health Service who so professionally serve American Indians and Alaska Natives – we say a special "thank you."