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Red Lake Community Feast

Red Lake Reservation, Minnesota

by

Charles W. Grim, D.D.S., M.H.S.A.

Assistant Surgeon General

Director, Indian Health Service

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Good afternoon. I am Dr. Chuck Grim, the director of the Indian Health Service. I will try to make my remarks as brief as possible so I don't keep you any longer than necessary from the wonderful feast that has been prepared today. U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona asked me to convey how very sorry he is that the devastating impacts of Hurricane Katrina made it impossible for him to join you today as planned. The hurricane created huge and immediate public health threats that Dr. Carmona must oversee as the leader of the U.S. Public Health Service. Please know that the Red Lake community remains a focus in his thoughts and plans.

As an Assistant Surgeon General and leader of the Indian Health Service, I serve as a strong advocate for greater access and quality services for American Indians and Alaska Natives within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Frankly, these may seem like long bureaucratic titles, but behind them are many Indian people, like myself, who are anxious to see that Indian Country is provided with the best possible health services and resources. There are many challenges ahead, but we will do our level best on your behalf.

A summer has passed since the devastating tragedy at Red Lake High School in March. The pain and loss of that day is still with us, but I trust we all have a strong resolve to help our young people in a number of ways. We need to help them to clearly see the bright future, that with some struggle and effort, can lie ahead. We need to connect them to our rich Indian heritage and traditions for the present and the future.

The text is the basis of Dr. Grim's oral remarks at the Red Lake Community Feast on August 30, 2005. It should be used with the understanding that some material may have been added or omitted during the presentation.

Today I had the privilege of speaking at separate events with Red Lake teachers, youth leaders, and elders. Each of these groups holds a key responsibility in fostering an atmosphere of understanding and outreach to the students at Red Lake. As these young people strive to learn and to begin the often difficult path toward adulthood, they have a strong need for role models and helping hands. Parents, siblings, relatives, and friends all can play extremely key roles in ensuring this path is not a tortured one, but rather a reassuring one that encourages personal responsibility, tribal pride, academic excellence, and good interpersonal skills.

We at the Indian Health Service are dedicated to helping the Red Lake community and we are proud of the leadership and courage shown by Dr. Kathy Annette, IHS Bemidji area director and a Red Lake Tribal member. We at the Indian Health Service are enormously proud of the Red Lake Tribal community and the strength and resilience that you have shown the nation and the world.

As I promised, I don't want to delay the start of this delicious and beautiful feast. I hope it brings a successful and harmonious school year for all. Thank you for your kind welcome and attention.