

**Indian Health Service
National Combined Councils
Awards Ceremony**

January 31, 2006

Opening Remarks

by

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Welcome to the Indian Health Service National Combined Council Awards ceremony. We are here today to recognize the exceptional performance and outstanding achievements of Indian Health Service employees who have made notable and lasting contributions to our goal of raising the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native people to the highest possible level.

I have always felt that the IHS has the most dedicated staff in the Federal government. I am especially impressed with the many Indian health professionals and workers across the nation and across time who have dedicated most of their lives to serving American Indian and Alaska Native people. We are honoring two of them here today—Jerome Simone and CAPT Judith Whitecrane. They are both receiving Lifetime Achievement Awards, and I would like to extend my personal thanks to them, as well as the gratitude of the entire agency, for your many years of faithful service to our people. I am sure as you look back over your illustrious careers, you can be justifiably proud of the work you have done and the real difference you have made in the lives of so many people. I am sure all of you here today who are receiving awards are feeling the same “humble pride” that comes from dedicating your lives to serving others.

Those of you being honored here today are among the many often “unsung heroes” of the Indian health system who have dedicated their careers and their lives to fighting the daily battles against the health problems and disparities that our American Indian and Alaska Native communities face. Your efforts, like so many dedicated Indian health workers, too often go unrecognized, particularly those who serve in the most rural and isolated clinics and service units.

That is why I consider it such a special pleasure and honor to be able to participate in the recognition of the exceptional work of these committed and dynamic employees receiving awards here today. Your exemplary work is representative of all your counterparts across the Indian health system who give their best each and every day to serve the health care needs of American Indian and Alaska Native people across the nation.

The text is the basis of Dr. Grim's oral remarks at the NCC Awards Ceremony on January 30, 2006. It should be used with the understanding that some material may have been added or omitted during presentation.

The recipients of this year's individual and group awards represent the high quality of professional and managerial staff who have helped make the Indian Health Service one of the best rural health care systems in the world. These men and women have demonstrated the kind of managerial excellence that inspires and motivates others, and their strong and capable leadership has helped forge a path to a better and healthier future for all American Indian and Alaska Native people.

And whether they realize it or not, they are also serving as mentors and role models to the younger generation coming up, who will be the Indian health leaders of tomorrow. It is good for all of us to remember, as we go about our duties, that we are being watched, and emulated, by these future leaders. I know and have seen many Indian health leaders, such as those here today, who serve as outstanding models of commitment and character, and I am optimistic that this tradition will continue as our up-and-coming leaders follow in their footsteps.

Thank you all for attending this ceremony, whether to receive an award yourself or to honor those who are receiving an award. I have often said, and will say it again now, that the Indian Health Service has some of the most competent, committed, and hard-working employees in the Federal Government.

Thank you.