

# Dorgan grows closer to IHS subpoena

Originally printed at <http://www.indiancountrytoday.com/home/content/Dorgan-grows-closer-to-IHS-subpoena-102619589.html>

WASHINGTON – The leader of the [Senate Committee on Indian Affairs](#) is growing tired of lacking attention from IHS involving an investigation of the agency's Aberdeen, S.D. office.

Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., threatened in late August to subpoena IHS officials to try to obtain information he is looking for as to why management, policy, and other alleged shortcomings have occurred at the facility.

SCIA held a hearing on the matter in June, during which Dorgan said he wanted to issue subpoenas, but he felt it was important to give the agency a little more time. A deadline was set at July 28, which came and went without an adequate update from IHS, according to Senate staffers.

Thomas Sweeney, a spokesman for IHS, said the agency "did comply fully with the request for information and met the July 28 deadline in full."

But Senate staffers said information has been slow to come, which is one reason why Dorgan continues to press the matter.

The Aberdeen office oversees 48 facilities in North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and Nebraska. Many tribal officials have complained about various aspects of its service.

Dorgan's office said the investigation to date has uncovered vacant positions, including ones focused on mental health. Indian suicides have happened during the time of the vacancies, the senator said.

"This is simply inexcusable and unacceptable," Dorgan wrote in a letter to IHS Director Yvette Roubideaux. He requested an "explanation for how this occurred, who is responsible, how these individuals will be held accountable, and how the agency plans to either quickly fill these positions or bring in temporary providers."

Dorgan said in June that Roubideaux had been cooperating with the investigation, adding that she has begun her own probe. Mismanagement at the agency had long been a problem before her tenure began, and senators have asked her to work hard to clean up the agency.

Dorgan told The Associated Press that the missing information includes such things as data on hundreds of complaints filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

He added that if the committee does not get the information within a couple of weeks it intends to issue subpoenas.

"I think these problems. ... go beyond this region, but this region is one that is particularly acute in terms of problems," he told the AP. "They transfer problem employees, there are substantial EEOC complaints. ... if we can get to the bottom of it in this region and apply it elsewhere, I'm hoping we can save lives."

Some tribal leaders have welcomed the scrutiny, saying they believe wrongdoing has been committed at area health facilities.

"Some of this stuff has been going on for years and years and years," Michael Jandreau, chairman of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe of South Dakota, said earlier this year. "Hopefully, if there is some serious criminal behavior, it will get tended to; and if not, it will clear up the perception."

IHS officials said the agency would respond to Dorgan's new concerns via letter.