

Epidemic Threat on Indian Reservations



— Jack Anderson

HEALTH EXPERTS fear that epidemics may break out on the nation's Indian reservations because of a critical lack of doctors and facilities. Indians already have the highest disease rate and lowest life expectancy of any group in the nation.

In an urgent memo to chairman James Abourezk (Dem-S.D.), the staff of the Senate Indian Subcommittee reports of evidence of "tuberculosis outbreaks" and "other serious disease epidemics particularly in the Aberdeen, S.D., area.

"We believe that the urgency of the present situation cannot be overemphasized," they stress.

The memo declares that "the backlog of people needing corrective surgery is now past 20,000. Of that number, 13,000 children are in need of surgery."

Yet President Nixon has impounded Indian Health Service money four of the last five years. This has caused a critical shortage of funds, which has brought on the Indian health crisis.

Without adequate funds, a "serious and growing shortage of physicians" has developed in facilities serving the Indians.

The facilities used by the Indian Health Service have also fallen into deplorable shape. "In the Aberdeen area alone," reports the memo, "60 per cent of the buildings being used by the IHS have been declared unfit for use by state inspectors.

"For example, Rosebud Hospital was constructed in 1914 and has been con-

demned even by IHS, but for lack of funds they will have to make do."

Nor can the Indians rely on their own people for health care. There are only 52 Indian doctors in the entire United States. The IHS has launched a new recruitment drive for doctors, but the program is unlikely to help Indians in critical need of health care now.

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ARMED Coast Guard cutters have been waging a secret war in the Caribbean against dope smugglers, illegal immigrants and anti-Castro commandos trying to land in Cuba.

Testifying behind locked doors on Capitol Hill, Vice Admiral Thomas Sargent, the acting Coast Guard commandant, told how his men were cracking down on "those who would hijack Cuban vessels or use the United States as a staging area for attacks on Cuban vessels or . . . territory."

He added confidentially: "I would not like to publicize too widely this particular patrol." The Coast Guard is helping to protect dictator Fidel Castro from his enemies, Sargent explained, in order to get Castro's cooperation in dealing with hijackers.

The Coast Guard's trim cutters, bolstered by planes and helicopters, also have seized thousands of pounds of dope and have blocked hundreds of restless Haitians from sneaking into the United States, reported Sargent.