

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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Chairman Kildee Statement at Subcommittee Hearing On “Challenges Facing Bureau of Indian Education Schools in Improving Student Achievement”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Dale Kildee (D-MI), chairman of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education, for a subcommittee hearing on “Challenges Facing Bureau of Indian Education Schools in Improving Student Achievement.”*

I’m pleased to welcome the public and our witnesses to this hearing of the subcommittee on early childhood, elementary and secondary education - “Challenges Facing Bureau of Indian Education Schools in improving Student Achievement.”

Last year, we held a hearing at the Gila River Indian Community – in the district of our fellow subcommittee member, Mr. Grijalva. That hearing was on how the No Child Left Behind Act has impacted Indian education, generally.

Today’s hearing is on issues facing Bureau of Indian Education-funded schools specifically.

Nearly 50,000 students – 10 percent of all Indian students – attend one of the 184 BIE schools.

Of the 184, BIE operates 61 directly and contracts with tribes to operate the other 123.

I have had an abiding interest in Indian education since my election to the Michigan Legislature in 1964.

In Michigan, I wrote the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver Act – to bring the state into compliance with its treaty obligations.

The act provides for a tuition-free education for qualified Michigan Indians at Michigan’s public colleges.

Today, I am able to express that interest not only through my chairmanship of this subcommittee, but also as the founder and Democratic Chairman of the House Native American Caucus, and as a member of the Natural Resources Committee.

I often say that land and language are the two anchors for protecting tribal sovereignty.

A third anchor for protecting tribal sovereignty is education.

History has presented us with unique challenges in providing every Indian child with the education he or she needs to better their and their family's station in life.

But, in one respect, the challenge facing tribes is the same challenge faced anywhere in the United States.

Our success in the 21st century economy is directly tied to our ability to produce a high quality labor force.

And that ability is, of course, directly tied to our ability to meet the challenge of providing every child – including every Indian child – with a world-class education.

And that is why we are here today.

We have a distinguished panel of witnesses who will provide us with insight on the unique challenges facing BIE schools in improving student achievement.

Because, while the need for education may be the same everywhere, the way to educate children is not.

Our witnesses will discuss a recent government accountability office report on how to improve BIE's assistance to tribes to help them implement academic accountability systems under NCLB that take into account Indian culture and languages.

The report identifies a number of shortcomings in that assistance.

Moving forward, we must clarify the roles and responsibilities of the many agencies involved – the Departments of the Interior and Education, states, and tribes.

And, in particular, we must ensure that the tribes – which are sovereign entities – are full partners in the process.

The law contemplates that the federal government will work with the tribes, not dictate to the tribes.

Some of our witnesses also will discuss the need to increase federal support for Indian education, and that also is critical.

Thank you.