

TESTIMONY OF THE DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY
FOR INDIAN AFFAIRS
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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UNITED STATES SENATE
HEARING ON THE AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I am pleased to be here to request your approval of the Administration's proposed American Indian Education Foundation Act of 1999 sponsored by Senator Inouye and other members of this Committee. The First Lady spoke on behalf of this worthwhile initiative at the ceremony she hosted announcing the design of the Sacajawea Dollar coin and to celebrate the contributions of American Indian and Alaska Native women, just one day after our legislative proposal was submitted to the Congress.

The purpose of the American Indian Education Foundation is to encourage gifts of real and personal property and income for the support of the mission of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Office of Indian Education Programs, as well as to benefit American Indian and Alaska Native children enrolled in elementary and secondary schools. Congress has authorized similar foundations in the past to benefit other activities within the Department of the Interior (Department) such as the National Park Foundation and the Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Congress has also passed legislation creating foundations in the Department of Agriculture.

Let me begin by outlining what the Department believes to be the principal reasons why an American Indian Education Foundation is needed.

First, while Congress and the Administration have worked together over the past few years to strengthen Indian Education, Indian schools still have numerous needs that can never be met through Federal funds alone. As an example, teachers serving in Indian schools are not fully prepared to meet the needs of students who will be entering the technological workforce of the 21st Century. While Federal funds support curriculum development and on-going school operations, there is little to no funding available to cover the costs of training teachers in using the technology that will soon be coming into the schools, through the BIA's Access Native America program. Funds raised by the American Indian Education Foundation could be used to pay for teacher training programs at our schools.

Another example is the tremendous need for Family Literacy Programs in Indian communities. It has been established through numerous studies that early childhood and family literacy programs, such as our Family and Child Education (FACE) program, work. While the BIA has been able to support 22 of these programs, which annually serve over 1,600 families and children, and family literacy programs in other agencies also provide support for BIA-

connected programs, there is a need to have these programs in all communities. The proposed foundation could support these activities.

Second, there is substantial private interest in supporting Indian education activities, but, up until now, there has been no national organization formed to support the BIA's educational activities. In the past, individuals have donated funds for Indian education that are invested by the Office of Trust Funds Management. These funds amount to more than \$900,000 and are used to fund activities according to the donor's wishes. Other groups, companies, and individuals have approached the BIA wanting to make donations for specific projects or activities at our schools. The proposed foundation would facilitate such contributions. Once the foundation is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt charity, contributions to the foundation would be tax-deductible.

Third, a National nonprofit foundation whose sole purpose is to raise funds for American Indians at the elementary and secondary education level does not currently exist. I'm sure that a number of Foundations have come to mind, including the American Indian Scholarship (AIS) Foundation, which exists to support students enrolled in colleges and universities. Some local schools or tribes have their own local nonprofits to solicit bequests and gifts for their own individual members, but there is no nationwide foundation to support the K-12 education of American Indian students. To their credit, local community businesses often do provide support to schools, donating food for Bingo fundraising events or buying yearbook ads, but their capacity for giving is limited by their geographic isolation. A small trading post on an Indian reservation can only give so much. The American Indian Education Foundation could solicit far larger donations through its national mission.

The BIA has worked hard over the past years to bring corporations and schools together in joint partnerships. The Microsoft Corporation has supplied equipment and software to the 19 schools involved in the Four Directions Project, one of the first Technology Innovation Challenge Grants funded by the U.S. Department of Education. In 1997, the Four Directions Project received the prestigious Government Technology Leadership Award for its innovation in bringing together partners that provide teacher training in a distributed computer environment. The Intel Corporation has supported technology initiatives at the Santa Fe Indian School, providing equipment, teacher training, and student training on how to refurbish old computers. These contributions alone exceed \$2 million. The Office of Indian Education Programs is currently working with Tech Corps on a pilot project supported by Compaq to provide online technical support to schools over the Internet. The project connects experienced network administrators from the private sector with inexperienced and, in some cases, untrained school network administrators over the Internet to help them solve technical problems in their school buildings. This will provide the schools with some of the help they need to make their school networks a success.

There is so much that can be done by the creation of partnerships with industry. A Foundation would be a viable entity to actively seek support on behalf of Indian children.

Next, let me address how the American Indian Education Foundation will be organized. An 11-member Board of Directors will govern the American Indian Education Foundation. The Secretary of the Interior and the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs will be ex officio non-voting members. Within six months of enactment of the legislation, the Secretary of the Interior will appoint nine additional Directors to serve on the Board without compensation. The members of the Board will be chosen based on their knowledge of Indian education and their diverse points of view. Members will be appointed for staggered terms. The Board of Directors will adopt a constitution and by-laws and be governed under the laws for nonprofit corporations in the District of Columbia. The Board of Directors will also be responsible for hiring the American Indian Education Foundation Chairman.

The American Indian Education Foundation will operate similarly to the National Park Foundation. It will operate separately from the Department of the Interior and the BIA. The proposed legislation authorizes the American Indian Education Foundation to receive some administrative support from the Department of the Interior during its initial five years of operation but does not request additional dollars. It is anticipated that the American Indian Education Foundation will be self-supporting after this five-year period.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to express the Administration's support for this legislation and encourage your positive consideration. The education of Indian children is one of the highest priorities of the Department, and we must all work together to ensure that no stone is left unturned to gather resources to ensure that the American Indian and Alaska Native children have the very best educational opportunities these United States can provide.

I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.