

Statement of Ben Nighthorse Campbell
Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
Hearing on the Indian School Construction Act of 2000 (S.2580)
September 6th, 2000

Now the Committee will receive testimony on *The Indian School Construction Act of 2000*, introduced earlier this year by Senator Tim Johnson to authorize Indian tribes to issue bonds to raise funds for school construction.

It is no secret that many if not most schools in Indian communities are badly in need of repair. It is also well known to members of this Committee and others that there is a backlog of some \$1 billion in school facilities needs in these communities.

The videotape we just saw included portrayals of the poor condition of Indian schools. It is important to note that these schools can be found anywhere in Indian communities around the country.

Unlike public schools throughout the nation which are funded and administered locally, the United States Government has legal responsibility for two school systems: Indian schools and the schools that educate the children of the men and women of our Armed Forces.

In addition to our legal obligations, it is simply unrealistic to expect Indian youngsters to learn, to grow and to become productive citizens if their schools are in the condition that most now are.

There are bright spots in the short run. After 7 years of level funding for Indian schools, for Fiscal Year 2001 the President finally made a substantial request for Indian school construction and repairs. In its FY2001 Interior Appropriations bill the Senate approved nearly \$300 million for Indian schools and I am confident that we can protect that appropriation as we begin Conference negotiations later this week.

I believe that just as innovative solutions to facilities problems are being experimented with for Health Facilities in Indian communities, we need to explore options to the Federal Funds approach. The *Indian School Construction Act* is a good beginning and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses this morning.