

TESTIMONY OF MR. DALE E. KILDEE, M.C.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS HEARING

S. 1290

A BILL CREATING AN AMERICAN INDIAN
EDUCATION FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman, good morning. As Co-chairman of the House Congressional Native American Caucus, I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to address S. 1290, a bill creating an American Indian Education Foundation.

I am pleased to announce that after the July 4th break, I will introduce the House version of this bill. My staff and I are working closely with the House Education and Workforce Committee to ensure bipartisan support for the bill. I would like to thank my colleague, Representative Patrick Kennedy for his support of this proposal.

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Chairman, as a senior member of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, I have enjoyed the opportunity of developing proposals designed to support Indian education. Up for reauthorization this Congress is the Elementary and Secondary Education Assistance Act that includes a section devoted to Indian education. This Act supports the educational, cultural and academic needs of American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian children.

It is estimated that the BIA educates approximately 12 percent of the Native American K- 12 population. This means that 88 percent of our American Indian and Alaska Native youth rely on supplemental educational programs like Johnson O'Malley. This program provides services to more than 200,000 Indian students. However, these programs are drastically underfunded.

A critical need for an increase in funding for school construction exists in Indian country. When I came to Congress 23 years ago, I was appointed Chairman of the Indian Education Task Force. I will never forget visiting schools that were in such poor condition that the children of these schools could barely keep warm let alone have a chance at getting a decent education. I know that the judges in my hometown in Michigan shutdown prisons that were in better condition than many schools I visited.

Our Native American students deserve a descent education. It is our responsibility to ensure that our children are studying in environments conducive to learning.

AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION FOUNDATION

I support the creation of an American Indian Education Foundation because I believe Congress must find a new way to supplement current funding for BIA Indian education programs. The Foundation would encourage gifts of real and personal property and income for support of the education goals of the BIA's Office of Indian Education Programs and to further the educational opportunities of American Indian and Alaska Native students.

The governing body of the Foundation would consist of 9 board of directors who are appointed by the Secretary of Interior for an initial period. The Secretary of Interior and the Assistant Secretary of Interior for Indian Affairs would serve as ex officio nonvoting members. Members of the board would have to be "knowledgeable or experienced in American Indian education and represent diverse points of view relating to the education of American Indians." Election, terms of office, and duties of members would be provided in the constitution and bylaws of the Foundation. Administering the funds would be the responsibility of the Foundation.

S.1290 would allow the Secretary of Interior to transfer certain funds to the Foundation. It is my understanding that the initial funding for the Foundation would come from existing donations or bequests made to the BIA. Funds prohibited by the terms of the donations would not be used for the Foundation.

The Foundation is not a new idea to Congress. Congress has, from time to time, created federally chartered corporations. In 1967, Congress established the National Park Foundation. The purpose of the Foundation is to raise funds for the benefit of the National Park Service. Funds received from individuals, corporations, and foundations are distributed to individual parks through competitive grants. S. 1290 is modeled after the 1967 Act.

I believe that an American Indian Education Foundation could be just as successful as the National Park Foundation.

CONCLUSION

I want to emphasize that I believe that Congress has a federal trust responsibility to ensure that every Native American receives a decent education. This Foundation would not replace that responsibility, but would support it through grants designed to support educational, cultural and academic programs.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks on creating an American Indian Education Foundation. Thank you.