

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 19, 2010

The Honorable Kent Conrad
Chairman
Budget Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Judd Gregg
Ranking Member
Budget Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Conrad and Ranking Member Gregg:

We write to urge you to increase the discretionary spending allocation in the FY2011 Budget Resolution by \$240 million to allow for an appropriation of \$293 million for the Bureau of Indian Affairs Education Construction account. This will begin to seriously address the \$1.3 billion backlog in dire construction needs for schools in Indian Country. There are 65,000 American Indian students who attend the 184 K-12 schools in 23 states administered by the Bureau of Indian Education at the Department of the Interior. The federal government must uphold its responsibility to American Indians and Alaska Natives by supporting the education of Native students through the provision of direct educational services and facilities that are safe and structurally sound.

Since 2003, funding for Indian school construction has been woefully inadequate, being cut from \$293 million in 2003 down to only \$52.9 million in the President's 2011 Budget proposal. This represents an \$8.9 million cut from FY2010 funding levels. The Administration's justification for this cut is that \$134 million was allocated for school construction under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. However, that funding will only allow for the construction of four schools. There are currently 60 schools on the BIE's list of schools in poor condition. At the current level of funding, it would take about 30 years to meet the education construction needs in Indian Country.

The Recovery Act funding is being put to good use, but does not make up for the years of underfunding in this program, and will not erase the significant needs to continue to exist to ensure that Indian students are educated in a safe and secure environment. Considering the \$1.3 billion backlog in Indian school construction, the Recovery Act money was merely a down payment on a promise that the federal government has made to the children in Indian country.

It is unjust to expect Indian students to succeed academically if we fail to provide them with a proper environment to achieve success. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,


Byron L. Dorgan
United States Senator


Al Franken
United States Senator

Tom Udall
United States Senator

Jeff Bingaman
United States Senator

Tim Johnson
United States Senator

Jon Tester
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator