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February 13, 2015

Dr. Charles M. Roessel
Director
Bureau of Indian Education
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Roessel:

The federal government has made a commitment to Indian students and families to provide educational opportunity in a manner that preserves their culture, language, and traditions. However, we are deeply concerned by recent reports of the deplorable conditions of schools maintained by the Bureau of Indian Education, particularly the Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig High School in northern Minnesota. This appalling situation not only adversely affects the quality of education these students receive, but also their health and safety. There is no question that many of these schools are not meeting the needs of its students, and as policymakers, we have a responsibility to demand better.

We welcome the request in the President's fiscal year 2016 budget proposal for some resources for the BIE. However, the administration has not put forward a plan to effectively analyze and prioritize the needs of BIE schools. As a result, it is questionable whether this investment proposed by the President will address the range of challenges facing these schools.

As the Chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee and the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education, we are deeply concerned with the wellbeing and education of all students. For too long, Indian education has been neglected, and we look forward to working with you and other stakeholders to help ensure all American Indian students receive an excellent education in a safe and healthy environment.

In the coming weeks, we plan to hold a hearing to further examine these issues and better understand what BIE is doing to address the situation occurring in schools under its jurisdiction. Specifically, we are interested in examining the following issues:

- What are the steps in the BIE's process to assess the condition of schools and facilities?
    - How does the BIE determine priority for school replacement or construction?
    - What kind of quality control does BIE have in place to ensure the measures they consider to determine the priorities are fair and appropriate?
    - Why has the school replacement list not been updated since 2004 as schools are being completed?
    - How does the BIE work with the tribes to ensure they have the most current information for that list?
    - What relief, if any, does a school have if they are not placed on the priority list?
- How do you plan to address personnel shortages in BIE-operated schools?
    - Is there a strategic plan for recruitment, retention, and professional development for school personnel and teachers?
    - Are there particular areas of relief you need in state or federal law to help address this issue?
- How does your agency work with Indian tribes who operate schools through contract agreements and compacts?
    - What steps are involved to consult with the tribes?
    - How does your agency provide technical assistance to grant recipients?

In preparation for the hearing, we request that your staff brief the Committee's staff on these issues and what the BIE is doing to address them. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to working with you to address these concerns. If you have any questions, please contact Leslie Tatum, with the Committee staff, at (202) 225-4527.

Sincerely,

JOHN KLINE
Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce

TODD ROKITA
Chairman
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary and Secondary Education