

Chairman Mike Simpson  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
Oversight Hearing: Indian Education  
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Opening Statement As Prepared

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Good morning and welcome to the first hearing of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress. Before we get started today, allow me to take a moment to welcome our returning members and our many new members. Of the programs within this subcommittee's jurisdiction, I think it is fair to say that there is more that Republicans and Democrats can agree on than disagree on. I hope we continue to work well together on those things that we all value, and that we strive to find common ground on those other things, no matter what is happening beyond these doors.

Almost a year ago today, our subcommittee was sitting here with then-Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Mr. Larry Echo Hawk, and my good friend Mr. Cole asked about per-pupil expenditures at BIE versus non-BIE schools.

We followed that up with a formal request to GAO to look into the matter—in effect, to update and expand upon studies they conducted several years prior. At the time, we thought we were asking GAO to answer a relatively simple question.

Fast forward to January 2013, when GAO informed the subcommittee that their final report won't be ready until July 2013, and that the subcommittee should be aware of significant management challenges at both the Bureau of Indian Education and the Bureau of Indian Affairs that are affecting their ability to deliver quality education.

The GAO reminds us that these are not new management challenges, and this is not the first time that problems with Indian education have been reported. This is also not the first time that this subcommittee has attempted to help turn things around, but we must keep at it not only to ensure that things do turn around, but that they stay that way. It is simply the right thing to do.

Therefore, these management challenges, coupled with recent or soon-to-be turnover at key leadership positions within the Department of the Interior and the bureaus, has prompted this subcommittee to convene this hearing now, before the GAO has completed its findings, so that the subcommittee can be in a stronger position to take any necessary corrective action as part of the fiscal year 2014 budget process. To wait would be to miss a narrow window of opportunity. And I believe the children have waited long enough as it is already.

The United States government has a unique and well-documented moral and legal responsibility to help educate American Indian children—a responsibility that goes far beyond the \$2.5 billion in direct federal spending in fiscal year 2012, of which this subcommittee's contribution was 35 percent. What is happening outside the classroom, and outside the BIE, has just as much impact on a student's success as what is happening inside, if not more. Many complicated factors come in to play and many more people no doubt are working hard to help students succeed.

But as we step back to evaluate our efforts, when we look at the condition of those schools for the roughly 48,000 students directly under BIE's responsibility, and when we look at measures of progress such as test scores, graduation rates, and employment, and we see the disparities that no doubt our witnesses will testify to today, one thing is perfectly clear to me:

We can and we must do better than this.

So I'm interested in us having a constructive and productive discussion today and in the days ahead about how we can help the agency to succeed. Whether it be not just funding, but also legislation, policy, a gentle nudge, a swift kick—I'm interested in putting all options on the table for consideration.

With that, let me welcome our witnesses here today as well as our distinguished guests in the audience and the many tribes and tribal organizations around the country who are submitting written testimony for the record. Thank you all for your commitment, and your assistance in helping us to help you.

Our first panelist is The Honorable Kevin Washburn, the newest Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior. Welcome aboard. Mr. Washburn is supported by the Acting Director of the Bureau of Indian Education, Mr. Brian Drapeaux, and the Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Mr. Michael Black. Because Indian education activities are implemented by both bureaus, it is helpful to have both of you here today.

After Mr. Washburn testifies, we'll take some time to ask questions from around the table. Then we'll ask Mr. Washburn to have a seat and invite to the table our second panel, which I will introduce at that time. After another round of questions for our second panelists, if there is time and if Mr. Washburn desires, he is welcome to join us back at the table for a final discussion.

Before we turn to Mr. Washburn, allow me to first ask our distinguished ranking member, Mr. Moran, for any opening remarks he may wish to make.

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