



Chairman Ken Calvert

*Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

**Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Oversight Hearing: Indian Affairs
February 27, 2015
Opening Statement as Prepared**

[Panel 1]

Good morning and welcome to today's hearing on the fiscal year 2016 budget proposal for Indian Affairs. This is an area within the subcommittee's jurisdiction which is a nonpartisan funding priority, and together we have been making a concerted push over the past several years to make incremental improvements in the lives of American Indians and Alaska Natives—particularly in healthcare, education, and law enforcement.

This has been a partnership, and I want to thank several of our key partners for being here today to testify. Our first panel includes Kevin Washburn, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs; Michael Black, Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs; and Charles "Monty" Roessel, Director of the Bureau of Indian Education. Gentlemen, thank you for being here today.

For the past few years, at this subcommittee's request, the Government Accountability Office has been another key partner on Indian education matters. What started in 2012 with a seemingly simple question of comparing per-student funding, inside and outside the BIE system, has grown into something much more complex. The GAO is currently in the middle of a study on BIE facilities condition and management, and I've asked them here today to be on the second panel and to give us an update on their progress.

Before we begin, I'll just make a few comments about the fiscal year 2016 budget proposal for Indian Affairs. This Administration has put its partners on this subcommittee in a tight spot, by raising expectations throughout Indian Country that we will struggle to meet.

The President's budget disregards the spending caps that he signed into law. That is how he is able to propose a \$323 million increase for Indian Affairs and a \$461 million increase for the Indian Health Service—without an offset. But current law requires discretionary spending to stay relatively flat in fiscal year 2016 in comparison to 2015.

So this subcommittee's challenge will be to find the money from within, to pay for the "have-to-do's" and make progress on the "should-do's", all without cutting the popular "nice-to-do's" by so much that we can't pass a bill.

[Panel 2]

Now we'll shift gears to focus in more detail on oversight of BIE facilities condition and management. I'd like to welcome our witness from the Government Accountability Office, Melissa Emrey-Arras, Director of Education in GAO's Education, Workforce, and Security

team. Thank you for being here today, and agreeing to testify prior to finalizing your study so that we may have an opportunity to make any necessary course corrections in the fiscal year 2016 bill.

Exactly two years ago to the day, in this room, Chairman Simpson convened a similar BIE oversight hearing in which GAO testified prior to finalizing a study we had asked them to do regarding per-pupil spending. GAO's testimony at that time helped this subcommittee to push this Administration to make Indian education a much higher priority than before.

To its credit, clearly, the Administration is stepping up. But I think as we will see today, clearly, we still have a long way to go. I recognize that we can help close part of that distance with more funding, but not all of it. There are some management and accountability issues—and perhaps even some legislative issues—that must be addressed before significant funding can follow.

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