

Thank you, Mr. Chairman

Today marks my first appearance as a member of the House Natural Resources Committee. My district is home to 3.5 million acres of federal public lands, the headwaters of the Mighty Mississippi River, five sovereign Native American bands, and the Duluth Complex. I have sought an appointment to this Committee since I started in Congress, and I have been fortunate enough to participate in an unofficial capacity several times.

Thank you very much to Chairman Grijalva (Gree All Vuh) and Ranking Member Bishop for welcoming me. I am excited to roll up my sleeves and get to work on Committee business.

Now, it is an honor and privilege to stand in for Ranking Member Cook and serve alongside Chairman Gallego (GUY-YEH-GO) today to discuss an issue pressing and pertinent to northern Minnesota and throughout the country.

First, I want to thank the chairman for his interest in Indian Education, but would encourage collaboration with the committee that has jurisdiction over the Bureau of Indian Education, the Education and Labor Committee.

While this Committee has very limited jurisdiction over Indian education, there are legislative proposals this committee has or can take action on. I was proud to support the Great American Outdoors Act which was signed by President Trump earlier this

year. The Act included a 5 percent annual carve out for Bureau of Indian Education Schools; when updating infrastructure with this funding, these schools can further develop infrastructure to provide better education and combat the virus.

Joining Chairman Bishop and the Committee's minority, I wish to express disappointment in the Committee Majority for refusing to act on S. 886, the Indian Water Rights Settlement Extension Act. This bill would help tribes in one of the hardest hit COVID-19 regions. As the CDC has advised, one of the best ways to combat COVID is hand washing.

Unfortunately, the democrat majority seems content in letting this settlement agreement collect dust as many Navajo households

struggle to access a reliable water supply. It has been 90 days since the Senate sent over a legislative package containing this agreement, and other bills aimed at the Native American communities and schoolteachers. This legislation is currently being held at the desk and it appears the majority has no interest in passing this critical agreement. I want to submit for the record a letter from President Nez asking Speaker Pelosi to schedule a vote on final passage for this bill.

That being said and turning back to the issue of BIE schools, in my district, we have three tribal schools, operated by the Leech Lake Band, the Fond du Lac Band, and the Mille Lacs Band. These schools provide a world-class education while preserving the traditions of the respective Ojibwe bands.

I would like to take a moment and thank the Mille Lacs Band for providing my office with background on what the Nay Ah Shing School has been doing. They plan to open with a Hybrid Learning and Distance Learning Options, following the guidelines of the Bureau.

The BIE payments from the CARES Act to the Mille Lacs Band will be used to implement infrastructure updates such as barriers to ensure a touch-free environment and for transportation options to implement social distancing for bussing.

Another point to be made on behalf of the Mille Lacs Band is the need for mental health counseling in the school. It is impossible for the mental health staff to

reach the students that need to be reached when schools are closed.

I am confident everyone participating today can agree that the priority is to safely get children back into the classroom, as that is the position of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the leading organization on children's health. Therefore, thank you to the Bureau of Indian Education for providing detailed guidance to help students return.

It is well documented that learning, health, safety, and nutrition of students are at their best when students are in school.

For example, evidence from the McKinsey Foundation shows that kids remaining at home will make existing achievement gaps

worse. Furthermore, EdSource highlighted in a recent article that student anxiety and depression have skyrocketed during closures.

With these effects in mind, we need to find ways to get students safely back into schools. I am encouraged by the Bureau's guidance drawing on the CDC's leadership by instituting social distancing, adding protective barriers, requiring face coverings, and added emphasis on hand washing and sanitizing.

Most importantly, we must remember these native schools serve sovereign nations in largely rural areas. Therefore, they require flexibility and local decision-making. The Bureau's guidelines do just that, by offering

expert opinion to match the needs of individual communities.

Mr. Chairman, I am a father of four and an education advocate. I want my children to get the best education possible, and our sovereign, native brothers and sisters deserve the same.

Let's provide our Native children the education they need and deserve by following the guidance from the Bureau and getting them safely back into their schools.