

*SCIP Legislative Hearing on H.R. 5444*

5.12.22

OPENING STATEMENT

- Thank you, Madam Chair.
- Today, we are considering H.R. 5444, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act.
- The bill would establish a 10-member commission—
- To document, investigate, and provide recommendations on actions the federal government can take to address Indian boarding school policies.
- Provisions regarding Indian education date back to the some of the earliest treaties and statutes after the formation of the United States.
- In 1819, the federal government began funding the education of Indian children as a way to accelerate the assimilation of Indian people.

- Over the next 150 years, it is estimated that more than 300 Indian boarding schools were established across the country, both on and off Indian reservations.
- During this time, many Indian children were taken from their communities, forced into western education, forced to forget their culture, all while living less than subpar conditions.
- There has been little question that Indian boarding school policies during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century impacted American Indian families.
- Assimilation policies today are viewed as a failure in federal policy.
- This hearing will be an opportunity to discuss whether the establishment of a commission is the correct solution.
- From a good government perspective, I do have some concerns about the authorization of “such sums” to carry out this Act and the precedent of granting subpoena power to a commission.
- Congress should exercise great care in the consideration of these authorizations.

- Further, this Committee last authorized the Alyce [Alice] Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff [So-bo-leff] Commission on Native Children in 2016 and Congress has yet to receive its report.
- Some of the challenges that commission has experienced should be weighed as we consider the creation of another.
- I would also be remiss if I didn't make a comment regarding Indian Education in the modern era.
- The Bureau of Indian Education at the Department of Interior provides education support to more than 30,000 students in 23 states through its 183 elementary and secondary schools located on or near Indian reservations.
- The B-I-E also oversees Indian boarding schools that are still in operation today.
- Countless reports in recent years from the Government Accountability Office detail that much work remains to be done to improve Bureau of Indian Education schools.
- In hearings over the past several Congresses, witnesses described the deplorable conditions Indian children today endure and blamed a bungling federal bureaucracy for

failing to provide a safe and healthy place for these students to learn.

- This body should be spending more time ensuring that the current Indian education system is functioning in the best interests of native children and discussing whether there are better solutions that haven't been considered.
- It will be critical we work with the Education and Labor Committee, which has primary legislative jurisdiction over Indian education policy.
- Before I yield back, Madam Chair,
- While I do appreciate the majority working to receive some statements from the Administration for the hearing record on a few of the legislative proposals before the committee this session,
- I am disappointed that D-O-I wasn't invited to testify today as the administration established a Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative in 2021 and released Volume 1 of their report yesterday.
- The Administration's views would certainly be valuable here today, to ensure that this bill is not duplicative of current efforts already underway.

- I sincerely hope we can invite the Administration to future hearings before this subcommittee.
- Thank you, I yield back.