

THE AMERICAN INDIAN  
EDUCATION FOUNDATION ACT

**HON. PATRICK J. KENNEDY**

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, July 30, 1999*

Mr. KENNEDY of Rhode Island. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to be able to join my friend and cofounder of the Native American Caucus, Congressman DALE KILDEE, for the introduction of this legislation.

Over the past several years it seems to me that Indian Country has continually been on the defensive. Often tribes have had to struggle to simply keep the status quo against legislative proposals that would serve to undermine Tribal sovereignty and weaken the Trust relationship.

Today can be different. Today we have a chance to do something positive for Indian Country. Right now we can begin a process where the hallmarks of treaty and trust are celebrated. We can offer Indian Country a distinct opportunity to improve the quality of life for future generations of Native children.

As I am sure the Committee is well aware, the state of education in Indian Country is far below that of non-Native communities.

The Per Pupil Expenditure for public elementary and secondary schools during the 1994-95 school year was over \$7,000. The Indian Student Equalization Program funding for BIA students was about \$2,900.

Unlike public schools which have state and local resources for educations, Indian schools in the BIA are totally reliant upon the Federal Government to meet their educational needs.

According to the 1990 Census, the American Indian poverty rate is more than twice the national average as 31 percent of American Indians live below the poverty level.

The 1994 National Assessment of Education Progress showed that over 50 percent of American Indian 4th graders scored below the basic level in reading proficiency. Another NAEP Assessment showed that 55 percent of 4th grade American Indian students scored below the basic level in mathematics.

American Indian students have the highest dropout rate of any racial or ethnic group (36 percent) and the lowest high school completion and college attendance rates of any minority group. As of 1990, only 66 percent of American Natives aged 25 years or older were high school graduates, compared to 78 percent of the general population.

Approximately one-half of BIA/tribal schools (54 percent) and public schools with high Indian student enrollment (55 percent) offer college preparatory programs, compared to 76 percent of public schools with few (less than 25 percent) Indian students.

Sixty-one percent of students in public schools with Indian enrollment of 25 percent or more are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, compared to the national average of 35 percent.

And finally, many of the 185 BIA-funded schools are in desperate need of replacement or repair.

Members of the Committee, it is clear from these statistics that there is a pressing need in elementary and secondary Indian education.

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

My colleagues, this is a situation which must be met with fierce determination. We need to support an aggressive agenda for Indian education because the current landscape is not meeting the challenge.

Right now, the BIA and Office of Indian Education is not authorized to distribute privately donated monetary gifts or resources to supplement the missions of these agencies. Yet every year numerous inquiries from the public are made as to where they can donate funds that will be spent wisely on behalf of Indian education. Simply put, we are missing out on a unique opportunity to help funnel non-governmental resources into Indian education. Ultimately, I believe this legislation is the appropriate answer to this situation. We can give the public a high profile mechanism to reach out to Indian Nations in a way that is apolitical and noncontroversial.

Simply put, the establishment of an American Indian Education Foundation is good government. It speaks to a modern way of doing things in which successful private-public partnerships are created. It is also an efficient way to get at the heart of a very pressing problem without placing an undue additional burden on taxpayers.

Within 2 to 3 years after enactment of this bill the Foundation should be completely self-sufficient and will not use more than 10 percent of its generated funds to pay for operating expenses. My colleagues, lets be clear at the outset—the purpose of this legislation is not to create a new level of bureaucracy or make some staffer rich. In my opinion such a situation would be one more example of where this government has failed in its trust duty to Indian Country. In brief, it is my intention to hold the bureaucracy to the letter of the law that we are now beginning to draft.

As for the role of Congress, I do want to make one thing perfectly clear. It should not be the intent of this legislation to use the funds raised to take the place of existing Indian education programs. Rather, these funds should be considered entirely separate and supplemental to the efforts of the Federal and tribal governments.

My colleagues, we all understand the budget shell game and I do not want to see the success of this program leveraged against governmental funding for teacher training, school modernization, and education technology initiatives.

In short, I do not want to hear one voice out there saying that we do not need to fund the Office of Indian Education because the Foundation has X amount of dollars in its account. To do so would again be another slight against our trust and treaty obligations to the First people of this nation.

In the end, I will not reiterate the obvious. Indian Country is lacking in the resources needed to train its children for the demands of the global economy.

The 106th Congress has a chance to help rectify this problem. While we should continue to allocate more federal resources towards the growing population of children within Indian Country we can also make it easier for private interests to become involved. Helping Indian children achieve is not only a public trust but a private one as well.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the House will move this legislation in an expeditious manner.

*July 30, 1999*

COMMEMORATING THE RECENT  
SPACE SHUTTLE COLUMBIA MIS-  
SION

**HON. STEVEN T. KUYKENDALL**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, July 30, 1999*

Mr. KUYKENDALL. Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate and commemorate the recent Space Shuttle Columbia mission. This is a historic event on many levels.

As many of you know, the Space Shuttle Columbia is the first shuttle mission being commanded by a woman. Eileen Collins, a U.S. Air Force colonel who became an astronaut in 1990, is leading this important mission. One of the mission objectives is to deploy one of the largest payloads ever, the Chandra Observatory. Ms. Collins is an experienced astronaut who has previously flown on two shuttle missions to the Russian space station Mir. Her experience and professionalism was a great asset to his mission.

The mission that the crew of Columbia undertook was a sizable task. At more than 45 feet in length and weighing more than 5 tons, the Chandra Observatory is one of the largest objects ever placed in Earth orbit by a space shuttle. Originally called the Advanced X-Ray Astrophysics Facility, the satellite was renamed the Chandra X-Ray Observatory in honor of the late Indian-American Nobel Laureate Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar Chandrasekhar, one of the foremost astrophysicists of the 20th century.

Chandra is designed to give scientists images of violent, high-energy activity in the universe where temperatures can reach millions of degrees and objects are accelerated to nearly the speed of light. The observatory will provide information on the nature of objects ranging from comets in our solar system to quasars at the edge of the observable universe. The goal is to understand the structure and evolution of the universe, such as the composition and location of so-called dark matter and the source of power driving explosions in distant galaxies. I also want to recognize TRW, the primary contractor of Chandra which is based in my district, which did a first-rate job on its construction of the observatory and seeing the project through with care.

Mr. Speaker, I also take this opportunity to send my best wishes to the students from the Steven White Middle School of Los Angeles. These students, who have an avid interest in space and science issues, were on hand to witness this historic launch. Working in conjunction with TRW, the students had a first-hand experience by getting a tour of the facility where Chandra was build and speaking to engineers who worked on the project. I am happy they had the opportunity to go to Florida to witness the launch. I know it was an event they will always remember.