

April 30, 2010

Washington, DC – Today, Rep. Ben Ray Luján sent a letter to the Department of the Interior asking them to address the longstanding and severe safety issues regarding the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, and to conduct a full review of the survey process to correct the structural problems within the BIA that have led to an unacceptable backlog of school maintenance issues. A recent report highlighted safety and structural concerns with respect to BIA schools in New Mexico's Third Congressional District.

Full Letter

April 30, 2010

*Secretary Salazar Ken Salazar and Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240*

Dear Secretary Salazar and Assistant Secretary Echo Hawk,

Many Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools in my district are in a state of extreme disrepair, and a recent report further highlighted the need for immediate action. Many of my constituents have been waiting several years for the BIA to properly respond to maintenance and repair requests. I am requesting that you swiftly address the longstanding and severe safety issues regarding the BIA schools in my district. Additionally, I would like to request that the BIA conduct a full review of the survey process to correct the structural problems within the BIA that have led to an unacceptable backlog of school maintenance issues that threaten the health, safety, and well-being of the students, teachers, and staff of these schools.

Schools serving Indian Country face many unique challenges. Rural schools are often isolated and difficult to reach, with students having to traverse crumbling roads for miles to arrive to school each day. Given this isolation and the difficulty of an evacuation if one were to be necessary, students are particularly dependent on having a safe and secure school building. Unfortunately, BIA school buildings in my district often have various safety-related deficiencies. The frequent structural damage to load bearing walls, leaky roofs, and inoperable fire alarms across the system are disturbing and dangerous. Our students deserve much better.

According to reports, school administrators and local officials have repeatedly requested surveys and funding to fix safety issues, but have faced only resistance and unresponsiveness

from the BIA. Such reports are alarming. I respectfully request prompt action to address the backlog of repair requests and an improved effort to address the dire condition of so many BIA schools. I understand that President Barack Obama and the Administration are working to improve services in Indian Country. This is an area that must be improved, and I have confidence that it will be resolved.

Sincerely,

Ben Ray Luján

Member of Congress