Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The fiscal year 2009 budget requests $2.2 billion for Indian Affairs, which includes Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) programs. The budget request includes increased funding for the Interior Department's Safe Indian Communities and Improving Indian Education initiatives as well as for the Indian Guaranteed Loan and Job Placement programs to meet tribal and individual Indian business financing needs and to help alleviate high unemployment rates in Indian Country.

The Safe Indian Communities and Improving Indian Education initiatives are the two major efforts undertaken by the Interior Department in FY 2008 and continued in FY 2009 to protect the lives and property of Indian Country residents and to improve the academic performance of students attending BIE-funded schools.

Tribal leaders from across the nation have attested to the crisis that has occurred throughout Indian Country from the spread of methamphetamine, calling crime stemming from the drug's use the number one public safety problem in their communities.

Because of their rural, isolated nature and widely dispersed law enforcement, tribal communities have been subjected to attack by organized crime and foreign drug cartels, resulting in a violent crime rate that, in some places, is 10 to 20 times the national average. In addition, residents of Federal Indian reservations on the U.S. – Mexico border also have had to face threats to their lives and property from drug dealers.

The FY 2009 budget request includes a $2.9 million increase over the FY 2008 enacted budget for the Safe Indian Communities Initiative, for a total of $26.6 million. With a cumulative investment of $50.3 million over two years, the Department will assist tribes with suppressing the production and distribution of methamphetamine, address related effects such as drug abuse and child neglect and abuse, and increase staffing in BIA-funded detention centers. The request also provides funding for: 1) additional officers for law enforcement, 2) specialized drug training for existing officers, 3) support for public awareness campaigns for the Indian public, and 4) additional resources to protect tribal lands located on the U.S. border.

The Safe Indian Communities Initiative increase will put additional law enforcement agents in targeted communities throughout Indian Country and fund additional training for the current force. The BIA also will expand the use of a mobile meth lab for training tribal police in identifying, investigating and mitigating the effects of methamphetamine use in their communities to more effectively combat drug-related crime. Targeted communities will be identified through a needs analysis that looks at the rate of violent crime, service population and current staffing levels.

One way to aid Indian Country children and youth and improve their resistance to drug use and crime is to ensure that they receive a quality education. The Improving Indian Education Initiative is key to ensuring that BIE students will enhance their academic performance with funding to hold schools accountable for meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals under the No Child Left Behind Act. Only

30 percent of BIE-funded schools are currently achieving their AYP goals. The Improving Indian Education Initiative promotes student achievement so that more schools will achieve AYP.

The FY 2009 budget request includes an increase of $1.4 million over the FY 2008 enacted budget for the Improving Indian Education Initiative, for a total of $25.5 million. The request includes an increase for formula funding which directly supports school education programs. The request also includes funding increases for employee displacement costs at five schools expected to convert from BIE-operated to tribally operated status and technology investments.

The FY 2009 budget request for Education Program Enhancements provides reading programs, tutoring, mentoring and intensive math and science initiatives at schools which are required to take corrective action to promote student achievement. In FY 2008, the Congress provided $12.1 million for enhancements. The BIE continues this program 2008 budget request level of $5.2 million.

The request also includes an increase of $1.3 million for the BIE's information technology infrastructure that supports education program applications. The increase will provide more bandwidth for the education IT network, which provides email and internet access for all 184 BIE-funded elementary and secondary schools, 14 tribal colleges and universities, adult learning centers and libraries and aids in school compliance with reporting requirements.

Overall, the FY 2009 budget request for the Operation of Indian Programs is $2.0 billion, a reduction of $59.5 million below the 2008 enacted level.

The FY 2009 budget request for Construction is $173.3 million, a reduction of $30.5 million from the 2008 enacted level. Included within this request amount is $115.4 million for Education Construction, a reduction of $27.6 million from the 2008 enacted level. The FY 2009 request fully funds the replacement of the Dennehotso Boarding School, a K-8 on-reservation boarding school in Arizona, and replaces buildings at the Chinle Boarding School, a K-8 on reservation boarding school in Many Farms, Ariz.

The Education Construction request also includes funding for facilities improvement and repair projects including $50.7 million for annual maintenance. In addition, employee housing is funded at $1.6 million.

Improving the economic viability of tribal communities through tribal and individual entrepreneurship is another way to ensure a brighter future for Indian Country. The Fiscal Year 2009 budget request includes an increase of $2.0 million for the Indian Guaranteed Loan Program, the Federal guaranteed loan program for tribal and individual Indian businesses located on Federal Indian trust lands or in tribal service areas. At the request level, the program will be able to guarantee up to a total of $85.2 million in loans. The budget also includes a $1.0 million increase for the Job Placement and Training program to add training programs for construction trades and employment caseworkers who assist tribal members with job placement.

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