$45 million in construction funding as part of recently passed omnibus spending bill will finish projects on the 2004 BIE school construction list; opens door for new se

Media Contact: Jessica Kershaw (Interior), Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov; Sarah Walters (ASIA), 202-219-4152
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RED VALLEY, Ariz. – On the heels of President Obama's State of the Union address where he committed to focusing on challenges and opportunities that will impact America for generations to come – including in Indian Country – U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell today announced $45 million to build the last previously identified Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) school construction projects. The schools slated to receive funding are the final two of 14 identified in 2004 by the Bush Administration as requiring the greatest need for replacement construction but never received Congressional funding.

"While this funding is long overdue, it meets critical educational needs to build safe learning environments for Native children, fulfills a broken promise to tribal communities, and clears the way for our new 2016 replacement school construction priority list," Secretary Jewell said. "The funding demonstrates the Obama Administration's commitment to Native youth success, opportunity and a brighter future. This budget proposal received bipartisan support in the House and Senate, and I thank Members of Congress who supported this request and shepherded it through the legislative process."

Jewell chairs the White House Council on Native American Affairs and has instituted a transformation of the BIE to improve the delivery of education services to Native children in both tribally operated schools and schools directly operated by BIE.

The Obama Administration requested the funds to replace the deteriorated facilities at Cove Day School (K-6) in Red Valley, Arizona, and the Little Singer Community School (PreK-8) near Winslow, Arizona. The funds were included in the "Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016" enacted last month.

The Secretary's announcement came during her visit to the Cove Day School, where she was accompanied by acting Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs Lawrence S. Roberts and BIE Director Dr. Charles "Monty" Roessel. The Secretary met with students, teachers and school officials to discuss ongoing BIE educational reform initiatives, programs to advance opportunities for Native youth, and the next steps in the process of building and renovating the new campus for the Cove Day School community. The visit was part of the President's Generation Indigenous ("Gen I") initiative to remove barriers between Native youth and opportunities to succeed and builds on the White House Rural Council's efforts to reduce rural child poverty.

Cove Day School, a BIE-operated school serving nearly 50 students residing in Cove and Red Valley, Arizona, was built in 1959. The existing campus has exceeded its projected life span and its mechanical, electrical and plumbing do not comply with building codes, and its insulation contains asbestos. The school is in need of a school nurse's office, adequate housing for teachers who travel long distances to

work at the remote school. Previous teacher housing was not constructed to withstand heavy snow, thunderstorms, freezing temperatures or heavy wind conditions, which causes employees to seek housing elsewhere and makes it difficult to retain staff. New improvements will also involve campus safety, such as a security system.

Little Singer Community School, a tribally-operated school located in Leupp, Coconino County, Arizona, on the Navajo Reservation serves students in Kindergarten through sixth grade and does not have the space to meet current educational program needs. The school, built more than 30 years ago, suffered water damage because of missing roof tiles that led to mold in the building. This damage led to the exposure of asbestos.

Of the $138 million acquired through the Omnibus spending package for BIE construction needs, $45 million will replace all of the campus buildings at Cove and Little Singer schools and provide roughly $8 million to start planning to replace schools identified on the 2016 replacement school construction list. The $138 million for BIE construction in 2016 is a $64 million increase from 2015 and includes $12 million to replace components of school campuses, $8 million for teacher housing, and $73 million for general facilities improvement and repairs, in addition to the $45 million for replacement school construction.

Interior’s new priority list for school replacement construction is nearing completion. Of the initial list of 78 eligible schools, 53 submitted applications for funding. A National Review Committee evaluated the applications and has identified the top 10 applicants. Eligibility factors were developed through negotiated rulemaking that included over 20 tribal representatives; and the factors developed include the age of the school buildings, the facilities’ condition index of each campus, and the percentage of children educated in portable classrooms. The top 10 schools most in need under these criteria have been invited to make a presentation to the National Review Committee panel on their ability to execute a school replacement project. The final replacement school construction priority list will include five projects to be constructed as appropriations are made available.

The Bureau of Indian Education oversees and funds 183 elementary and secondary schools on 64 reservations in 23 states, serving more than 48,000 students, or about seven percent of Native American students. Of these, 59 are operated by the BIE and 124 are tribally-operated under Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act contracts or the Tribally Controlled Schools Act grants.