Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON - Combatting a methamphetamine crisis in Indian Country and promoting higher academic achievement in Indian schools are key initiatives in President Bush's FY2008 budget for the Department of the Interior, Secretary Kempthorne said today.

"The President has proposed more than $30 million in targeted ·funding to help American Indian communities battle the rise of methamphetamine crime on reservations and improve educational opportunities for today's Indian youth," Kempthorne said. "These efforts are critically important to ensure that future generations of American Indians have safe and secure communities and that Indian students can fulfill their potential through education."

"Tribal leaders describe a methamphetamine crisis that has the potential to destroy an entire generation if action isn't taken," Kempthorne said. "They refer to it as the second smallpox epidemic and rank it as the number one public safety problem on their reservations." Organized crime and foreign drug cartels have taken advantage of the limited law enforcement presence on tribal lands to produce and distribute the drug, resulting in a violent crime rate in some communities that is ten to 20 times the national average.

"At one reservation particularly hard hit, an estimated 25 percent of babies are born addicted to methamphetamine," Kempthorne said. "We cannot ignore this tragedy. We must help Indian Country remove this scourge from its midst. We will stop these peddlers of poison."

The President has proposed a $16 million increase to fund the Bureau of Indian Affair's Safe Indian Communities Initiative, which will strengthen law enforcement capabilities on tribal lands by providing $5 million to hire and train additional law enforcement officers; $5 million to increase staff at Indian detention facilities and for training detention officers; and $6 million to provide specialized drug enforcement training for officers and public awareness campaigns about the dangers of methamphetamine use for tribal communities.

To raise the level of student performance in Bureau of Indian Education schools, the President's budget calls for an additional $15 million investment to improve Indian student academic achievement, a key goal of the No Child Left Behind Act. The BIE system has 184 schools that educate about 50,000 students.

"As one of only two federal school systems, our Bureau of Indian Education schools should be models of achieving the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act," Kempthorne said. "Yet, just 30 percent of our schools are meeting these goals. We must change course so Indian children receive the education they deserve."

The Initiative will provide enhancements and tools to help these schools raise the level of student performance and increase the number of schools achieving Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. The initiative will provide targeted, intensive educational assistance to schools that have yet to achieve their Adequate Yearly Progress goals and provides additional funding for

student transportation, education program management and information technology.

Included in the request is $5.3 million to fund a new program element, Education Program Enhancements, to use resources for specific initiatives, projects, and new activities associated with targeted improvements to educational instruction and learning. An increase of $4.25 million for student transportation will offset rising fuel costs and ensure that BIE school transportation continues to meet national and state standards.

An increase of $3.6 million for Education Program Management will establish positions for specialists dedicated to the administration and management of data, contracts and school finances. And an increase of $1.85 million will fund the Native American Student Information System, an information management tool that will support the BIE's efforts in improving student and school performance. More detailed information is in the FY2008 Interior Budget in Brief which is available online at: http://www.doi.gov/budget/2008/08Hilites/toc.html.