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Although have not seen the draft report from the Department's Inspector General, I am well aware of the deplorable conditions at some of the Indian Schools.

That is one of the main reasons for our proposal made last September to establish an Office of Indian Education which would break the education functions out of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. That proposal would move facilities management out of the Department and put it where it belongs, in the hands of the school principals. Local school officials should have the authority and the funding and be held responsible if the plumbing isn't repaired.

Unfortunately, Congress initially blocked reorganization and instructed me to appoint a task force to consider how the BIA should be structured. That task force is meeting this week in Oklahoma City, and hopefully it will recommend feasible steps to address this very problem.

In another action, the Office of Construction Management and BIA is working on an accelerated plan for catching up on the 550 million dollar backlog of repairs and maintenance for BIA education facilities. When they briefed me two weeks ago, I told them to give me a plan for clearing the backlog well before the year 2000. We also are compiling a list of priorities to show members of Congress who may be skeptical -- one look at any of one of the facilities on the list will convince anyone of the need for action.

We need to remove the obstacles that face Indian youngsters so they can receive a quality education.