# Lawmaker says Native American schools are in terrible shape By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff 05.31.15

WASHINGTON — Officials in Washington, D.C., have rarely paid much attention to the Bureau of Indian Education. It is considered to be a government department that is not run very well.

But that might all be changing.

President Barack Obama wants to give more money to the bureau, which oversees nearly 200 schools serving 50,000 Native American children. Much of that money — about $150 million — would go toward fixing dozens of deteriorating schools. The president also wants to help young Native Americans lead better lives.

**Agreeing There Is A Huge Problem**

Representative John Kline is a powerful lawmaker from Minnesota. He is also a Republican, who often does not agree with President Obama. However, the two men agree on this problem. Kline is trying to make things better at the Bureau of Indian Education. In the past few weeks, he has held meetings in Washington to talk about the problem.

Kline recently visited a crumbling tribal Native American school building in his home state. He is urging his fellow Republicans to support the president's plan to give the schools more money. He says the money is important for making sure Native American students can go to school in safe buildings.

"You've got collapsing roofs, leaking roofs, buckling floors, exposed wires, popping circuit breakers, gas leaks. That's totally unacceptable," Kline said. "You can't be well-educated in my opinion when you're attending school wearing your coat, wearing your mittens and hoping that the blanket keeps out the 30-degree-below-zero air."

**Classroom Conditions Are Poor**

Washington leaders became interested in the Bureau of Indian Education after some newspaper stories reported on the terrible conditions in tribal school buildings. The stories were published in a Minnesota newspaper last year. They urged President Obama and lawmakers to do something about the problems.

"Kids shivering in thin-walled classrooms or studying under leaky roofs year after year aren't getting the education they need or deserve," the newspaper reported. The paper also said children get the wrong message about the value of education when their schools are in such bad shape.

Last year, the federal government said about one-third of tribal schools were in poor condition. It also said more than $1 billion would be needed to fix them. Another $1 billion would be needed to deal with older repair problems.

**Unequal Money Distribution**

The Bureau of Indian Education has undergone many changes. Thirty-three different people have been in charge of the group over the past 36 years. The person in charge now, Monty Roessel, is trying again to make things better. Roessel recently told lawmakers he believes his effort will succeed where others have failed because he is focused on two key goals: improving school buildings and improving instruction.

Roessel said if money becomes available next year, his department will finally be able to fix the neediest schools. After that, he hopes even more schools can be upgraded.

Fifty-eight buildings are currently listed in poor condition. That means it makes more sense to replace them rather than try to fix them. "I agree it's one of the biggest frustrations that we have," Roessel said.

The Department of Defense, the government department that runs the military, also has many schools in need of repair. But it has received a lot more money to fix them. In 2010, the department received $5 billion for a 10-year program to fix its schools, which mostly teach the children of members of the military. The Bureau of Indian Education received just $39 million over the past four years — less than the cost of one of the Defense Department's elementary schools.

**Treaties Promised Good Education**

In the 1800s, the federal government signed treaties with Native Americans promising that their children would be able to get an education.

But the Bureau of Indian Education has often not lived up to this promise.

Part of the problem is that there are not enough staff workers, according to a government report. The Bureau's leaders come and go at a rapid rate, which makes it hard to get anything done. There is poor communication within the office and not enough supervision. Poverty and the remoteness of many tribal schools makes things even more complicated.

Today, fewer than 1 in 10 Native American children attend tribal schools. However, the children that do go to tribal schools perform worse than Native Americans who attend public schools.