

HEIDI HEITKAMP
NORTH DAKOTA
HART SENATE BUILDING 502
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
PH: 202-224-2043
FAX: 202-224-7776
TOLL FREE: 1-800-223-4457

<http://www.heitkamp.senate.gov>

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 8, 2014

COMMITTEES:
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY
BANKING, HOUSING AND
URBAN AFFAIRS
HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
INDIAN AFFAIRS
SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

President Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I greatly appreciated your recent visit to the Standing Rock Sioux Nation and North Dakota. During your visit, you had the opportunity to meet with Native American youth and discuss the importance of improving the education of Native children. I write to follow up on my request for federal assistance for the Cannon Ball Elementary School.

As you well know, the United States has a distinct legal, treaty, and trust responsibility to provide for the education, health, social welfare, and safety of Native children. The failure of the federal government to meet these solemn commitments has resulted in Native children being the most at-risk population in the country. According to the U.S. Department of Education's, National Center for Education Statistics, in 2011, only 18 percent of Native fourth-graders were proficient or advanced in reading, compared with 42 percent of white fourth-graders. In mathematics, only 17 percent of Native eighth-graders were proficient or advanced compared to 43 percent of white fourth-graders.

Last November, I visited Standing Rock's Cannon Ball Elementary School. The current structure, originally built in the 1930s, is now a patchwork of piecemeal repairs and additions. The school battles mold, rats, and a leaky roof. The school also lacks safe playground equipment. Cannon Ball Elementary also has one of the lowest student performance rates in the North Dakota. The wonderful children and dedicated staff at the school deserve better. Replacing the school would be a great starting point in creating a safer learning environment and improving the outcomes for these students.

The Cannon Ball Elementary School is a unique for being both a North Dakota public school and located within the Standing Rock Reservation. This school cannot rely on the local tax base for their operating budgets, as other schools do. And while the school is eligible for school construction funding from the state as a North Dakota public school, their limited taxable valuation means they would not be able to repay any sizeable loan. The federal Impact Aid Program provides payments to offset the costs of enrolling federally connected children; however, this chronically underfunded program has left Cannon Ball Elementary in its current state.

Children succeed when they know they are valued. The Cannon Ball Elementary School does not send this message its students. Instead, it gives them the impression they have been forgotten.

BISMARCK OFFICE:
228 FEDERAL BUILDING
220 EAST ROSSER AVENUE
BISMARCK, ND 58501
PH: 701-258-4648
FAX: 701-258-1254

DICKINSON OFFICE:
40 1ST AVENUE WEST
SUITE 202
DICKINSON, ND 58601
PH: 701-225-0974
FAX: 701-225-3287

FARGO OFFICE:
306 FEDERAL BUILDING
657 SECOND AVENUE NORTH
FARGO, ND 58102
PH: 701-232-8030 - 1-800-223-4457
FAX: 701-232-6449

GRAND FORKS OFFICE:
33 S. 3RD ST., SUITE B
GRAND FORKS, ND 58201
PH: 701-775-9601
FAX: 701-746-1990

MINOT OFFICE:
105 FEDERAL BUILDING
100 FIRST STREET S.W.
MINOT, ND 58701
PH: 701-852-0703
FAX: 701-838-8196

Our federal government does not have a good track record in providing opportunities to Native Americans. We need to begin to right the wrongs and give these children hope of a brighter future, and we can start in Cannon Ball.

I appreciate the work you have done to raise the profile of Native American children in our society. I look forward to your continued attention to this important issue and your help in making sure the students at Cannon Ball get the new school they deserve and need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Heidi Heitkamp". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "H" and "K".

Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senate