

Monday, June 18, 2012

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico’s Third District spoke on the House floor today in support of H.R. 1556, his legislation to encourage educational sovereignty by providing Santa Fe Indian School with the tools to generate income for its own academic and cultural programs. The bill passed the House with unanimous support and will now move to the Senate to await further action. Below are Luján remarks as prepared.

“Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Chairman Hastings, Chairman Young, Ranking Member Markey, and Ranking Member Boren for working with me in the Natural Resources Committee to help address the many issues impacting Indian Country and the tribes I represent in New Mexico.

“I also want to recognize the hard work of the Superintendent of Santa Fe Indian School and Former Governor of Kewa Pueblo, Everett Chavez, and former AIPC President and former NCAI President Joe Garcia on this bill. They worked with the Pueblos and the All Indian Pueblo Council to support this legislation which will help Santa Fe Indian School and New Mexico’s 19 Pueblo’s achieve educational sovereignty for Native American students across New Mexico.

“Santa Fe Indian School and the 19 Pueblos approached my office early last year seeking the introduction of a technical change to the Omnibus Indian Advancement Act to allow certain lands designated to the school to be used to generate income to provide funding for academic and cultural programs at the Indian School. Knowing the importance of what Santa Fe Indian School provides to Native American students in New Mexico, I was very interested in this approach to move toward true financial independence and educational sovereignty for Santa Fe Indian School and its students.

“I want to point out the importance of sovereignty and what it means for our tribal brothers and sisters to be able to provide a quality education for their own children. Education is truly empowering – especially when Native American students are able to get an education that

embraces their cultural and traditional identities – and that is the type of education Santa Fe Indian School provides.

“I worked with Superintendent Chavez and Santa Fe Indian School to draft a bill that would make a technical amendment to allow the school to explore economic opportunities so that students at the Indian School can attain the best possible education and to be able to support their mission.

“Santa Fe Indian School provides a challenging, stimulating, and nurturing learning environment that shares educational responsibility with Native communities, parents, and students to develop the students' true potential to meet obligations to themselves and their tribal communities.

“In this time of financial uncertainty and the limitations of the federal government to assist in federal education programs, it is important to give Santa Fe Indian School the tools they need to help their students receive a quality education regardless of the political and financial climate in Washington. H.R. 1556 would achieve that goal.

“I am proud to be able to assist Santa Fe Indian School in amending the Omnibus Indian Advancement Act to allow the school to achieve new heights in educating Native American students. This technical amendment will help make Santa Fe Indian School more self sufficient and create greater opportunities for students attending the Indian School by ensuring the financial capability to maintain and expand the level of academic and cultural education for Native American students.

“This is a common-sense amendment that will help Native Americans students in New Mexico and I urge the support of my colleagues, and I thank the Chairman for his support as well.”

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