

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. MURKOWSKI). The minority leader is recognized.

EDUCATION OF INDIAN CHILDREN

Mr. DASCHLE. I will use my leader time this morning.

This is the cover of a recent *Parade* magazine. The man in this photograph is the great-great-grandson of Sitting Bull, one of the most extraordinary leaders America has ever produced.

His name is Ron. His horse is Thunder. He is part of the new generation of American Indian leaders. He is a lawyer by training, but education is his life's work. He is president of the Sitting Bull College in Fort Yates, ND, on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, and chairman of the President's Board of Advisors on Tribal Colleges and Universities.

The subtitle of this article expresses a fundamental truth that Sitting Bull taught and that people I talk with throughout Indian Country still believe today: Education is the key to a better future for the American Indian people. Education, more than anything else, gives a person the power to determine his or her own destiny. It is the most effective tool there is to relieve the grinding poverty that exists today in too many tribal communities throughout America.

When Native Americans surrendered their lands more than a century and a quarter ago, the United States Government promised to provide the descendants of Sitting Bull and all Native Americans, free education, health care and other basic necessities of life, forever. That is one reason I am disturbed by the results of two new audits by the Interior Department's inspector general.

The first audit reveals that, over a 3-year period, the BIA's Office of Indian Education Programs used at least \$5 million from a contingency fund for non-emergency purposes, including staff retreats, bean bag chairs, televisions and puppets. This misuse of contingency funds shortchanged Indian schools of money they need for emergencies.

The second audit, which concerns the BIA school construction program, also documents numerous examples of poor management and lack of accountability. It found that Indian children are being forced to try to learn, and their teachers are trying to teach, in schools that put them at undue risk of injury because "no one in BIA ensures that school buildings are not occupied" until hazards are corrected. That is shameful.

This second report also found that 30 percent of the school construction and repair projects it reviewed failed to meet the BIA's own goal of completing design and construction within 3 years.

The IG made nine recommendations that it said could strengthen the BIA school construction program and in-

crease the program's benefits for Native Americans. Those nine recommendations were included in a draft copy of the report the IG gave to BIA officials for comment.

Incredibly, despite being given an extended deadline, Bureau officials failed to respond to the draft. As a result, when the report was released publicly, it noted that "all nine recommendations are considered unresolved."

I do not know why the BIA failed to even acknowledge those nine recommendations for improving the Indian school construction program; I do not know if it was arrogance, indifference, incompetence or simply a result of being overwhelmed. But I know that it is unacceptable.

The BIA operates or funds 187 schools in 23 States, including South Dakota. Most of these schools were built in the 1940s or 1950s. Many are decades older than that. Few are equipped to support computer labs or other sorts of modern equipment that are now considered essential in most school districts.

I have visited BIA schools where children had to place trash cans beneath the holes in the roofs to catch the rain. I have been to BIA schools in which cold winds whipped through broken windows. I visited a school, which has since been replaced, in which neither the furnace nor the bathroom plumbing worked. That is not keeping our promise to educate Indian children. That is a disgrace.

The Cheyenne Eagle Butte School and dormitories on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in South Dakota were built by the BIA around 1960. The floor tiles in both the school and the dormitory contain asbestos, a known cause of lung cancer and emphysema.

To date, the BIA's remediation efforts consist of recommending that the school "keep the boiler room door shut" and keep the floors waxed so the tiles will not chip and flake.

Three years ago, the Cheyenne Eagle Butte School was first on the BIA's priority list for school replacement. Then the BIA changed its criteria, and the school dropped down on the list. Today, the tribe has no idea when the school will be replaced.

Several weeks ago, I spoke on this floor about the Crow Creek Tribal Schools in Stephan, SD.

Two years ago, Crow Creek's middle school was condemned and replaced with modular trailers. The elementary school and high school still need to be replaced. Throughout the high school, crumbling walls are supported by steel braces; one can see exposed electrical wires.

The Crow Creek Council has been lobbying for money to fix the schools on the reservation for 25 years. Recently, the Crow Creek school superintendent received this letter from the South Dakota state fire marshal. I have had it reprinted and enlarged here. I will quote:

[T]he buildings are dangerous and represent a threat to life.

The State fire marshal "strongly recommends discontinued use of both" the elementary and high schools.

Two weekends ago was graduation weekend at Crow Creek Tribal Schools. The school had originally planned to hold the graduation ceremony outside because the gym has been condemned—but it rained on graduation day. So 1,500 people—the graduates, their families and friends—crowded into a condemned gymnasium that threatened to fall down around them.

I ask you, what other group of children would we allow to be treated this way?

The BIA has committed to replace the Crow Creek gym—but it is unclear when. Tribal officials had thought students would be playing basketball in the new gym this fall, but the construction funds have once again been delayed.

In the last several months, Crow Creek schools have experienced a crisis of suicides among students. Mental health experts call such episodes "cluster suicides." Six young people on the Crow Creek Reservation have killed themselves in the last 6 months—and many more have tried. In April, there were 21 suicide attempts; the month before, 28. Last month, a 14-year-old girl tried to hang herself behind the elementary school. She was discovered and cut down just in time. The most recent suicide was a 19-year-old young man who had dropped out of school. Had he stayed, he would have graduated last month.

Clearly, the suicide crisis at Crow Creek schools is not caused only by crumbling schools. This is a complex crisis with very deep roots. It involves public health issues and myriad other issues.

But what message does it send to young people when they are forced to try to learn in a condemned building?

There are school buildings like the Crow Creek Tribal Schools throughout the BIA system. All told, the BIA school construction backlog is estimated at \$1 billion. At the current funding levels, it would take decades to get through that backlog.

In 2000, when he was running for President, then-Governor Bush met with tribal leaders in New Mexico and promised to invest \$1 billion to fix crumbling BIA schools. Yet, the President's proposed budget for next year cuts funding for Indian school replacement for the second year in a row. That is wrong.

America's commitment to build new schools for children in Iraq and Afghanistan is admirable, but it does not erase our treaty obligations to provide good schools for Indian children in this country.

The JOBS bill the Senate just passed last month includes a promising program that was first suggested by tribal educators in my State. The program would allow tribal governments to issue school construction bonds; the Federal Government would pay the interest and the principal on the bonds.

The BIA school construction bond program would increase by about half the number of BIA schools that are currently being replaced or repaired each year.

Yesterday evening, I met with two officials from the Porcupine school board on the Pine Ridge Sioux Reservation. Those two gentlemen are with us this morning.

The grade school in Porcupine is 40 years old and overcrowded. The foundation is unstable. The boiler is unreliable. There is no cafeteria; the children eat their meals in the hallways.

The Porcupine elementary school is number two on the BIA's school construction replacement list. School board officials say they have been told that construction on a new school could start in July—not this year, not next year, not the year after that, but in 2008—more than 4 years from now.

The new Indian school bonding program would enable us to replace and renovate more schools faster.

For the sake of the children at the Porcupine elementary school, and all the children in crumbling and inadequate BIA schools throughout America, Congress needs to get the JOBS bill—with the BIA school construction plan—to the President and get this important program up and running as soon as possible.

Once the law is signed, we are going to insist that the BIA report regularly to Congress on how the BIA school construction program is being implemented and managed. We expect progress and results. We will not tolerate the lack of accountability that is documented in the two recent audits of the BIA's Office of Indian Education Programs.

This chart says it so poetically and prophetically. More than a century ago it was said the first time. Sitting Bull implored representatives of the Federal Government:

Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children.

In that same spirit, we must now put our minds together and hold our Government accountable to keep the promises it made in trusts and treaties and laws to Native Americans.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. COLEMAN. Madam President, I rise today to talk about continued progress for the American economy, especially back home in Minnesota.

I have been coming down to the Senate floor now from time to time to talk about how the policies of President Bush and a Republican majority, working across the aisle with some like-minded Democratic friends in the Congress, are putting America's economy back on track and Americans back to work.

I remember back in October when I came down to the floor and talked

about early signs of economic growth that would set the stage for the job creation we have been witnessing in the last 8 months. Right after I spoke, my friend the assistant Democratic leader challenged me a bit, questioning whether my prediction for a brighter economy were not a little premature.

As the saying goes, "There is nothing more horrible than the murder of beautiful theory by a brutal gang of facts."

What may have been a trickle of good economic news last October has cascaded into a steady stream of good news. Even that most persistent critics of the President's economic program must now concede. The economic engine of America is humming. Job growth is a reality.

Two weeks ago, I talked about a Minneapolis Star Tribune article appropriately entitled, "Minnesota Jobs Roar Ahead," which reported that Minnesota broke all kinds of jobs records in April when Minnesota experienced the largest one-month drop ever in its unemployment rate and more manufacturing jobs were created at a record pace as well.

Today, I want to talk a little about an article in my home town paper, the Saint Paul Pioneer Press, entitled "Factories on a Roll." The article highlights that U.S. Manufacturing activity expanded for the 12th consecutive month last month, and factories boosted employment to meet strong demand for their products.

This is true back home in Minnesota. A regional survey by Creighton University economists found that Minnesota's "Business Conditions Index" rose to a 10-year high.

Also, Minnesota enjoyed its best month-to-month gain in jobs in April since October of 1999. The progress of the last few months has led number of economists to describe Minnesota's economy as "spectacular" and "breathless," and indicates that employment opportunity in the manufacturing sector will continue to improve.

I stand by what I said in October. The President's commonsense tax relief has played the crucial role in helping the economy to rebound from the recession that began during the final months of the Clinton presidency.

More than 1.9 million Minnesota taxpayers saw their taxes decline this year under the President's tax relief. More than 1.2 million couples in Minnesota will benefit from the reduced marriage penalty and more than 475,000 couples and single parents will see an increase in their child tax credit.

I wonder if some folks on the other side of the aisle would still prefer I hold my tongue while we wait for more evidence. If so, I would suggest that perhaps "irrational exuberance" has given way to "unreasonable pessimism."

I would even go so far to say that one of the economy's chief risk factors today is those who continue to talk it down. And why? Could it be perhaps that for some, economic good news

might be political bad news? Much of the howling about the economy has fallen silent. But where is the consistency? If the President was to blame for the economy before, isn't he to be praised for its performance now? I can't wait to see how this one is spun.

The economy has overcome great obstacles and is firing on all cylinders in Minnesota and elsewhere. No, we have not died and gone to economic heaven; problems remain. There is good and bad in every economic period. But considering where we are and what we have come through, this is solid, broad-based and even historic progress.

I was optimistic last October. Why? Because this is what always happens when you give people control of more of their own paychecks.

Federal programs are not the engine of economic growth: Regular folks who save, invest and consume are. But that doesn't mean there aren't things we can do right now to help.

For the sake of working families across the country, we need to focus on maintaining that economic growth and jobs creation through a forward looking legislative agenda. We need to pass an energy bill, a highway bill, and important legal reforms that alone would create 3.5 million new, and good paying jobs.

We need to make permanent the President's tax code in enforcing this economic growth. We need to keep the economy going down the track it is on.

The optimist sees the light at the end of the tunnel. The pessimist assumes it is an oncoming train. With all the evidence in hand, it is time to doubt the doubters and call them to account.

Although we saw the signs last fall for the economic growth and jobs creation that was beginning to unfold, some folks had doubt. But, as President Franklin Roosevelt put it better than a half century ago, "The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith." Hopefully this continued good news from Minnesota and across America will help the doubting Thomas's still among us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. MILLER. Madam President, I rise today to join with my colleagues in celebrating this anniversary. In 2001 and again in 2003, Congress had the wisdom to pass two bold tax cut plans. I firmly believe they were the key to turning around this economy.

When the President came to office, the economy was already taking a turn for the worse. Job growth was slowing down, the stock markets were moving in the wrong direction. A dose of strong medicine was needed. Our President came up with a bold plan for tax relief, to get more money out of Washington and put it back into the pockets of workers and the small business owners who earned it.

President Bush knows, as President Kennedy knew, and as President