

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 8, 2018

The Honorable John Tahsuda III
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Tahsuda,

On May 3, 2018, we held a meeting at Chemawa with Director of the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) Tony Dearman, Chemawa Superintendent Lora Braucher, several Chemawa administrators, and tribal leaders from seven of the nine federally recognized tribes in Oregon. Our discussions were wide-ranging and covered many of the concerns raised in a letter we wrote to you in November 2017.

We are heartened by the willingness Director Dearman and Chemawa administrators expressed to work with us. However, even with your written response dated April 16, 2018, and this meeting, many questions and concerns remain. In an effort to keep the conversation moving in a positive direction, we request that you allow staff at Chemawa as well as staff at BIE to speak freely with us. In the meantime, we request your timely response to the following questions:

1. In our meeting, we were told that the Office of the Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs (Indian Affairs) has a policy prohibiting direct communication between the Congressional delegation and Chemawa and BIE officials, which complicates productive and meaningful communication. We request that this policy be changed to allow BIE administrators and staff to speak freely with Members of Congress, which would make legislation to do so unnecessary.
2. The response dated April 16, 2018, from Indian Affairs referenced a system of “chain-of-command” procedures to resolve staff complaints at the lowest possible level. In detail, please describe these chain-of-command procedures for addressing complaints made by staff.
 - a. How does this system address complaints about direct supervisors?
 - b. Is there a process for staff to report issues to BIE superiors outside of the school if a staffer feels their concern was not properly honored through the chain-of-command?
3. The April 16 response also described an annual staff survey and a thrice-yearly school climate/improvement survey for staff and students to provide input and report concerns.
 - a. What are the key areas of concern that arise from these assessments?
 - b. What does the school do to address these areas of concern?

4. We request a detailed copy of Chemawa's most recent school budget.
5. What is the annual revenue of the student fund, comprising of outside income from business ventures on the school's land?
 - a. How is the money used?
 - b. Who has oversight over it?
6. It is our understanding that there are no written audit records of Chemawa's finances.
 - a. Is this in accordance with Indian Affairs regulations for the management of federal funds?
 - b. How is financial oversight of Chemawa's funds conducted?
7. It is also our understanding that the majority of purchases and acquisitions for Chemawa go through Indian Affairs, causing delays and inefficiencies.
 - a. What is the procurement protocol for food and supplies at Chemawa?
 - b. How can this be simplified and expedited?
8. We are concerned about the maintenance of Chemawa's old, historic campus. A September 2016 report by the Department of the Interior's Inspector General (OIG) found systemic facility deficiencies at BIE schools, endangering student health and safety.
 - a. How are these deficiencies being addressed, specifically at Chemawa?
 - b. What is the estimated cost of the necessary renovations and maintenance of the Chemawa campus?
 - c. Is this the responsibility of BIE or the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)?
9. The response from Indian Affairs stated that Chemawa has established a trimester schedule, as opposed to a semester schedule, to help students who arrive with credit deficiencies gain additional credits.
 - a. Is this standard practice at BIE schools?
 - b. Have you analyzed the success of this move to accelerated trimester-length curricula, in contrast to more traditional semester-length classes?
10. What changes to the recruitment process can be implemented to increase Native American teachers at Chemawa?
11. Please describe the policies and procedures to train teachers and support staff to meet the mental health, behavioral, legal, and academic needs of the students. How does this training acknowledge the unique historical trauma experienced by Native American communities?
12. What is the current staff vacancy rate at Chemawa?

13. We received a list of current Chemawa school board members, their tribal membership, and their term dates. According to this list and the most recent available student data, the school board is not representative of the description we were given in Indian Affairs' response to our initial letter: comprising of members from the top five tribes with the highest student membership at Chemawa, appointed to staggered terms.
- Please explain why the current school board is not reflective of this description.
 - What is BIE doing in the anticipation of all five board members terms ending on August 30, 2018?
 - Please also describe the school board's role, authority, and responsibilities.
14. What is BIE policy for the expression of tribal religions, traditions, and customs at Indian schools, particularly those with diverse student bodies like Chemawa where 84 tribes are represented among the student body? The letter from Indian Affairs referenced a writing and cultural cluster credit required for all Chemawa students – what is the curriculum for this, and how does the school determine what tribal customs are included?

We support Chemawa's mission to provide opportunities for success to Native high school students from across the country, and their focus on academic and cultural education, college readiness, and workforce training. We look forward to working with you, the Bureau of Indian Education, the staff and students at Chemawa, and our tribal leaders and thank you for your attention to our questions.

Sincerely,



KURT SCHRADER
Member of Congress



RON WYDEN
U.S. Senator



JEFFREY A. MERKLEY
U.S. Senator



PETER DeFAZIO
Member of Congress



EARL BLUMENAUER
Member of Congress



SUZANNE BONAMICI
Member of Congress