

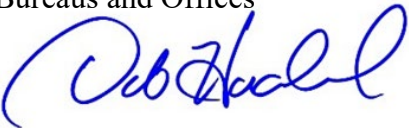


THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

JUN 22 2021

Memorandum

To: Assistant Secretaries
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretaries
Heads of Bureaus and Offices

From: Secretary 

Subject: Federal Indian Boarding School Truth Initiative

The recent discovery of 215 unmarked graves by Canada's Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc First Nation at the Kamloops Indian Residential School should prompt us to reflect on past Federal policies to culturally assimilate Indigenous peoples in the United States.

Beginning with the Indian Civilization Act of 1819 and running through the 1960s, the United States enacted laws and implemented policies establishing and supporting Indian boarding schools across the Nation. During that time, the purpose of Indian boarding schools was to culturally assimilate Indigenous children by forcibly relocating them from their families and communities to distant residential facilities where their American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian identities, languages, and beliefs were to be forcibly suppressed.

In most instances, Indigenous parents could not visit their children at these schools. Many students endured routine injury and abuse. Some perished and were interred in unmarked graves. Survivors of the traumas of boarding school policies carried their memories into adulthood as they became the aunts and uncles, parents, and grandparents to subsequent generations. The loss of those who did not return left an enduring need in their families for answers that, in many cases, were never provided. Distance, time, and the scattering of school records have made it more difficult, if not impossible, for their families to locate a loved one's final resting place and bring closure through the appropriate ceremonies.

The assimilationist policies of the past are contrary to the doctrine of trust responsibility, under which the Federal Government must promote Tribal self-governance and cultural integrity. Nevertheless, the legacy of Indian boarding schools remains, manifesting itself in Indigenous communities through intergenerational trauma, cycles of violence and abuse, disappearance, premature deaths, and other undocumented bodily and mental impacts.

The Department of the Interior (Department) must address the intergenerational impact of Indian boarding schools to shed light on the traumas of the past. For more than a century, the Department was responsible for operating or overseeing Indian boarding schools across the

United States and its territories. The Department is therefore uniquely positioned to assist in the effort to recover the histories of these institutions. While it may be difficult to learn of the traumas suffered in the boarding school era, understanding its impacts on communities today cannot occur without acknowledging that painful history. Only by acknowledging the past can we work toward a future we are all proud to embrace.

Plan for the Indian Boarding School Truth Initiative

To assist in achieving the goals outlined above, the Department shall undertake an investigation of the loss of human life and the lasting consequences of residential Indian boarding schools. The primary goal of the investigation shall be to identify boarding school facilities and sites; the location of known and possible student burial sites located at or near school facilities; and the identities and Tribal affiliations of children interred at such locations.

The work will proceed in several phases, detailed below, and shall include the identification and collection of records and information related to the Department's oversight and implementation of the Indian boarding school program (Program) from 1819 to 1969; formal consultations with Tribal Nations, Alaska Native corporations, and Native Hawaiian organizations to clarify the processes and procedures for protecting identified burial sites and associated information; and the submission of a final written report on the investigation, to the Secretary by April 1, 2022.

Collect Relevant Information

Under the supervision of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, the Department should prepare a report detailing the available historical records that relate to the Program. This should include a survey of historical records in Federal repositories such as the National Archives and the American Indian Records Repository, as well as records maintained by non-governmental organizations operating Indian residential boarding schools in the Program period.

Our objective is to identify all boarding schools that participated in the Program and the students enrolled in each, along with each student's Tribal affiliation. While attention should be paid to records that provide insight into residential facilities and plans, enrollment records and vital statistics, correspondence, maps, photographs, and administrative reports, particular emphasis should focus on any records relating to cemeteries or potential burial sites associated with a particular residential facility, which may later be used to assist in locating unidentified human remains. The Department's comprehensive records assessment will allow it to better analyze the human impact of the Program and provide a basis for planning future sitework to be conducted as part of the investigation.

Tribal Consultation

The information collected by the Department is intended to provide a basis for future sitework to protect cemeteries and burial sites. Before any such work occurs, the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs shall consult with Tribal Nations, Alaska Native corporations, and Native Hawaiian organizations on determining the nature and scope of proposed sitework; on addressing cultural concerns and the potential dissemination of sensitive information generated from the existing

records or from future sitework activities; and for the future protection of burial sites and the potential repatriation of human remains in compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. The views gathered in consultations conducted as part of the investigation should be included in the final report.

The Office of the Solicitor shall review all relevant statutory and regulatory requirements and Departmental policies and procedures that may pertain to anticipated sitework activities, such as the exhumation and repatriation of human remains and the protection and preservation of historical and archaeological resources. This review should also include the policies and procedures applicable to consultation with Tribes, Alaska Native corporations, and Native Hawaiian organizations on the protection of burial sites and associated records and information.

Conclusion

Over the course of the Program, thousands of Indigenous children were removed from their homes and placed in Federal boarding schools across the country. Many who survived the ordeal returned home changed in unimaginable ways, and their experiences still resonate across the generations. The work outlined above will shed light on the scope of that impact.

Thank you for taking time on this important responsibility.

cc: Deputy Secretary
Solicitor
Bureau/Office Chiefs of Staff