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Udall, Bipartisan Group of Senators Introduce Critical School Safety Legislation

Offers grants to Tribes and Bureau of Indian Education schools to stop violence before it happens

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senator Tom Udall (D-N.M.), vice chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, joined a bipartisan group of senators in introducing the Students, Teachers and Officers Preventing (STOP) School Violence Act of 2018, legislation that invests in early intervention and prevention programs to stop school violence before it happens — including providing key resources to strengthen school safety in Native communities.

The STOP School Violence Act authorizes the Department of Justice to make grants to states and Tribal governments to develop school security infrastructure and train students, school personnel, and law enforcement to identify signs of violence and intervene to prevent people from hurting themselves or others. The legislation also permits the development and operation of anonymous reporting systems, and formation of school threat assessment and crisis intervention teams to help schools, including those funded by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), intake and triage threats before tragedy strikes.

"We need to take action to protect our schools in New Mexico and across Indian Country and prevent the next Parkland or Aztec High School shooting from devastating another community," Udall said. "This bipartisan legislation will provide key resources to New Mexico schools, Tribes, BIE schools, and Tribal law enforcement to identify warning signs, strengthen school safety infrastructure, and take other concrete steps to stop school violence. This bill includes important provisions to ensure that Tribes have the tools they need to keep students and teachers safe in Native communities. This legislation is just one piece of a larger effort we must undertake to protect New Mexico and Tribal communities from violence, including enacting common-sense measures to keep guns out of the hands of those who seek to hurt innocent people."

In addition to Udall, the legislation was introduced by Senators Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), John Cornyn (R-Texas), Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), Bill Cassidy (R-La.), Heidi Heitkamp (D-N.D.), Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.V.), Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), Dean Heller (R-Nev.), Joni Ernst (R-Iowa) and Susan Collins (R-Maine).

Indian Country has experienced several incidents of school violence over the last two decades, including a 2005 school shooting on the Red Lake Indian Reservation in Minnesota, a 2014 school shooting near the Tulalip Reservation in Washington, and a 2017 school shooting near the Navajo Nation in Aztec, New Mexico. Since the mass shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, at least three schools serving Tribal

communities in North Dakota, New Mexico, and Arizona have received anonymous threats of violence.

"The future development of Indian Country is dependent on the education that we provide them with today," said Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye. "Children in our school system and their educators should not be burdened with fearing for their safety while attending school. The timing of STOP is imperative to provide our students with a safe environment to facilitate their educational growth and confidence. In light of recent events, the Navajo Nation applauds congressional leadership for taking action on this issue to benefit our students and communities in Indian Country."

In recent years, the Department of the Interior's Office of the Inspector General (DOI-OIG) uncovered startling gaps in school security at Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools. DOI-OIG [found](#) that only 4 of the 16 BIE schools surveyed had emergency plans for shootings, bomb threats, hostage situations, or other mass violence events. Most recently, DOI-OIG [reported](#) that BIE personnel criminal background check systems are inadequate, leaving students at risk.