

purposes, unemployment rates of 70% on the reservations and alcoholism and diabetes and other health problems?

And a high school dropout rate as high as 50% -- the highest for any U.S. student population?

Over 800 treaties were signed and upheld by the Supreme Court -- and the government vowed to maintain an adequate level of education and healthcare throughout the reservation system.

But every single treaty was broken!

Today nearly one of every three American Indians live in poverty. One of every five Indian homes is without either a telephone or indoor plumbing.

And the government spends just \$1 on Indian healthcare for every \$2 it spends on healthcare for every other American citizen.

How does this impact education for young Native Americans?

Please let me explain.

I write to you from the advantage of firsthand experience because as the Executive Director of the American Indian College Fund, I'm a Native American and I grew up on the reservation. I know personally how much education means to the future of all Native Americans.

The tribal-college movement began in 1968, with the founding of Navajo Community College. Sitting Bull College, Little Big Horn College, and others followed, until 29 Indian colleges and universities had sprung up.

All are tribally-chartered, serving poor, isolated Indian reservations -- and all provide both traditional and cultural education.

And I am proud to report to you that the spirit and ambition of Native America is being revitalized today.

However, this bright promise of education is still only available to a few, and I am urgently seeking new friends who will support the fund so that we can increase our scholarships and financial aid to Native American students.

Perhaps you are wondering now, "But why tribal colleges? Why not let the Native American students attend regular state and private schools?"

The answer to that question is twofold: