

Bill Would Allow Students to Go to Sectarian Schools

Senator Ernest Gruening (D-Alaska), testified last Wednesday on behalf of Alaska Natives, strongly urged approval of his bill, S. 876, which would allow recipients of Bureau of Indian Affairs scholarships to attend sectarian institutions of higher learning.

During the hearings, conducted by the Indian Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, Senator Gruening pointed out that passage of the bill would permit Native recipients of BIA scholarships to attend two sectarian institutions in Alaska, Alaska Methodist University in Anchorage and Sheldon Jackson Junior College in Sitka.

Senator Gruening said, "We are all aware of the contributions made to American education by sectarian institutions of higher learning.

Oftentimes these schools have been able to direct their energies and resources

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toward specific academic programs which the larger public universities have had to ignore because of their mission of educating large numbers of students.

The senator continued, "Yet, because of a statute which has remained unchanged for a half century, our Indian youths who are recipients of Bureau of Indian Affairs scholarships are unable to do this."

"For purposes of the statute, 'Indians' has been held to include Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts.

"Other Americans who receive education grants and loans from the federal government," Senator Gruening said, "are not restricted as to the institutions they can attend. I see no reason why the young Indian should not be free to choose the institution in which he wishes to enroll."

Bureau of Indian Affairs Commissioner Robert L. Bennett presented testimony urging enactment of Senator Gruening's bill Bennett said, "This would bring our program in line with other more recent federal programs of higher education assistance which do not prohibit benefits to students attending sectarian institutions."