

Senate Expands, Reaffirms—

Indian Education Act

By EDWARD M. KENNEDY
United States Senator

On Monday the United States Senate reaffirmed its commitment to the welfare of American Indian by extending and expanding the Indian Education Act. The law, enacted in 1972, is considered by many Indian educators to be the most significant legislative breakthrough in the struggle for Indian self-determination. As

author of the Act and chairman of the Senate Special Subcommittee on Indian Education which provided the bases for its development, I have been concerned about its full implementation.

The quality of Indian education has, in a sense, been a test of our Government's understanding of democracy and commitment to allowing coexistence of diverse cultures. Yet, in the past, the Government has often failed this test. Indian education had become a national tragedy. It had not provided Indian children with a minimum competence necessary to prepare them for a productive role in society at large; neither had it been responsible for perpetuation of the values and culture unique to the Indian people. The Indian Education Act symbolizes the Government's commitment to reversing the trends of the past and I am pleased that Congress has renewed this commitment.

There are two new programs of particular interest included in the Senate bill passed on Monday. One provides for grants to "institutions of higher education, Indian organizations and Indian tribes for the purpose of preparing individuals for

teaching or administering special programs designed to meet the special educational needs of Indian children;" the other authorizes fellowships for Indian students pursuing graduate and professional programs at institutions of higher learning. A final amendment increases the authorization for financial assistance to Indian-controlled schools on or near reservations.

I would also like to call attention to a section of the bill directed toward the bilingual educational needs of Indian children. It authorizes funds "to carry out programs of bilingual education for children on reservations serviced for elementary and secondary schools for Indian children operated or funded by the Department of the Interior."

I am pleased that the programs developed under the Indian Education Act have been so successful and that the National Advisory Council on Indian Education has become an important force in the field of Indian education. I commend my colleagues in the Senate for their timely recognition of the progress made thus far and their responsiveness to the continuing special educational needs of Indian children.