

STATEMENT OF CARRIE L. BILLY, PRESIDENT & CEO
SUBMITTED TO THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES
ADDRESSING HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION

February 3, 2020

REQUEST SUMMARY

On behalf of the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), which are the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), we are pleased to present our Fiscal Year 2021 (FY 2021) appropriations recommendations for the 29 colleges funded under Titles I and II of the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act (TCU Act); the two tribally chartered career and technical postsecondary institutions funded under Title V of the TCU Act; the two Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) postsecondary institutions; and the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA). The BIE administers these programs, with the exception of IAIA, which is funded in its own account. We respectfully recommend the following funding levels:

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

- \$82,000,000 to fund institutional operations under Title I (\$64,109,000) and Title II (\$17,000,000), along with TCU Endowments (\$109,000) and technical assistance (\$701,000), of the TCU Act. This funding would provide the Congressionally authorized amount of \$8,000/Indian student for first time since the enactment of the TCU Act more than 40 years ago. This request also provides an additional \$100,000 for needed technical assistance, which has been level-funded for 15 years despite growing numbers of developing TCUs and increased demands for accountability and student success.
- \$15,000,000 for Title V of the TCU Act, which provides partial institutional operations funding for two tribally chartered postsecondary career and technical institutions.
- \$10,710,000 for the Institute of American Indian Arts.
- \$25,000,000 for Haskell Indian Nations University and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, the BIE's two postsecondary institutions.
- \$35,000,000 for TCU Infrastructure Improvement, authorized under section 113 of the TCU Act, yet never funded.

OPPORTUNITY AND INNOVATION IN INDIAN COUNTRY

The nation's 37 TCUs operate more than 75 campuses and sites in 16 states. TCU geographic boundaries encompass 80 percent of American Indian reservations and federal Indian trust lands. American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) TCU students represent more than 230 federally recognized tribes and hail from more than 30 states. Nearly 80 percent of these students receive federal financial aid and more than half are first generation students. In total, TCUs serve more than 165,000 AI/ANs and other rural residents each year through a wide variety of academic and community-based programs. TCUs are *public* institutions, chartered by federally recognized Indian tribes or the federal government. No TCU is chartered by any other entity, and although several financially challenged institutions may *desire* to be tribal colleges, the criteria and standards are unambiguous, with tribal control being the central pillar. Further, all TCUs receiving federal funding have full and sustained accreditation by independent regional accreditation agencies and, like all U.S. institutions of higher education, must regularly undergo stringent performance reviews to retain their accreditation status. Each TCU is directly

accountable to its tribal community/communities, and each one is committed to improving the lives of its students through higher education and to moving AI/ANs to self-sufficiency. Our collective vision is strong sovereign tribal nations through excellence in Tribal higher education. To achieve this vision, TCUs have become workforce and job creation engines, public libraries, tribal archives, small business incubators, and community computer labs. They operate Native language learning centers and immersion programs, community gardens, economic development centers, childcare centers, and applied research hubs for everything from natural resources to food sovereignty and community behavioral health.

Despite the hope and opportunity that higher education brings to Tribal communities, as well as the trust responsibility and binding treaty obligations, the federal government has never fully funded TCU institutional operations authorized under the TCU Act. But TCUs are resilient and resourceful, and we are proud to be leading the nation in many areas, including preparing an AI/AN workforce of nurses, land managers, and teachers for Native schools. For example, half of all AI/AN special education teachers in Montana are graduates of Salish Kootenai College. TCUs prepare professionals in high-demand fields, including agriculture and natural resources management, IT, and building trades. By teaching the job skills most in demand on our reservations, TCUs are laying a foundation for tribal economic growth, which is the *only* way to move tribes and tribal members to self-sufficiency. Yet, we know that workforce development is not enough. We must do more to accelerate the move to self-sufficiency – we must move beyond simple workforce training. Today, TCUs are tackling the tougher – but much more significant – issue of job creation, because we know that to break the cycle of generational poverty and end the culture of dependency that grips so much of Indian Country, simply filling jobs that would be filled anyway is not enough. We must create new industries and new businesses and build a new culture of innovation. Our job creation initiative is focusing initially on advanced manufacturing, through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Energy, National Laboratories, TCUs, and industry. Already, we are seeing results, with new TCU-tribal-industry partnerships, new contracting opportunities, and new jobs for our students and graduates.

Tribal Colleges continually seek to instill a sense of hope and identity within Native youth, who will one day lead our tribal nations. Unacceptably, the high school dropout rate for Native students remains around 50 percent. TCUs are working with local schools to create a bridge for AI/AN students as early as elementary school, encouraging them to stay focused on achievable goals, finish high school, and go on to the local TCU. TCUs offer dual credit courses for high school students, provide math teachers for local high schools to improve course delivery, and host weekend academies, after school programs and summer camps for middle and high school students. At the other end of the spectrum, TCUs offer GED/HiSET training and testing and have 2+2 partnerships to bridge programs with regional universities. All are solid steps to bolster future prospects for Native youth and break the cycle of generational poverty.

TCUs: A SOUND FEDERAL INVESTMENT

Darrick Lee (Diné) served in the U.S. Marine Corps as a journeyman electrician. This training and his interest in the electrical field led him to Navajo Technical University (NTU) in Crownpoint, NM. Since 2013, Lee has earned a certificate in electrical trades, associate's degrees in energy systems and mathematics, and, in May 2019, a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. “[Darrick] was a vital part of our success in becoming the first TCU to attain ABET accreditation,” says Dr. Peter Romine, head of NTU's engineering department. Darrick's research area is in solar powered micro grids, which led him to develop a test system for his

senior capstone project with the potential of being implemented on the Navajo Nation. In his free time, Lee volunteers as an animal rescuer and advocate at Soul Dog Rescue, Compassion Corner, and the Blackhat Humane Society, and he has fostered several animals.

Monique Moran (Sicangu Lakota) is a 2018 GED graduate from Sinte Gleska University's (SGU) adult basic education department. Monique was raised by her grandmother, but after her grandmother passed away, Monique moved from family member to family member until ending up in juvenile detention. A distant relative took Monique in and taught her the value of hard work. After having her son at age 17, Monique quit high school due to lack of financial support. Determined to break the cycle of poverty and give her three children a better childhood, Monique enrolled in the adult basic education/GED program in fall 2018. She passed her GED tests in November 2018 and obtained a high school equivalency certificate. About eight months later, Monique reached out to her GED tutor, requesting help in registering for academic courses at SGU. Monique enrolled in business education classes for the fall 2019 semester. With help from her advisor, Monique was able to schedule her classes so she would still be home in time to care for her children after school. When Monique completes her business degree, she plans to help her husband with his construction business.

Every TCU has stories of transformative change as Native students find their identity and develop the skills and confidence to serve. This is the power of the federal investment in TCUs.

TCU INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT: NEEDED AFTER 40 YEARS (\$35 MILLION): We urge Congress to fund sections 112 and 113 of the TCU Act (25 U.S.C. 1812-1813), authorized more than 40 years ago to create a much-needed Tribal Higher Education Infrastructure Improvement Program. For TCUs to realize our goals of strengthening our tribes as sovereign nations and building a 21st century Native workforce, TCUs must have the facilities and infrastructure capable of educating and training students in a safe environment. This simply cannot be done on the scale needed in classrooms with leaking roofs and exposed and substandard electrical wiring; outdated computer labs; students sleeping in cars and trucks because there are no dorms; and the slowest – yet most expensive – Internet access of any institution of higher education in the country. Yet, that is what TCUs are asked to do. In 2018, AIHEC conducted a survey of 22 TCUs, which revealed a list of chronic facility-related needs, including student and faculty housing, classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. The 22 TCUs have a self-reported estimated need of \$332.5 million in deferred maintenance and rehabilitation costs and \$558 million to complete existing master plans.

As a first step, we request that the Subcommittee work with the Senate to ensure that the Department/BIE conducts a 40-year overdue study on the current condition of TCU facilities and by a date certain submits a report identifying critical TCU renovation and new construction needs (25 U.S.C. 1812). A comprehensive and unbiased TCU Facilities Report, to include all 37 TCUs, is vital. We respectfully request that the Subcommittee direct the BIE to use administrative funds to conduct the long awaited TCU Facilities Report and further, that \$35 million be allocated in FY 2021 to begin addressing TCU infrastructure needs.

CHALLENGES: INDIAN STUDENT COUNT, TAX BASE, AND GROWTH

ISC Formula and Non-Beneficiaries: As noted earlier, TCU operations funding remains insufficient and our budgets are further disadvantaged, because, unlike other institutions of higher education, most TCUs receive operations funding based on the number of Indian students

served, with “Indian student” defined as a member of a federally recognized tribe or a biological child of an enrolled tribal member. Yet, approximately 15 percent of TCU enrollments are non-Indian students. Many TCUs seek operating funds from their respective state legislatures for non-Indian state-resident students (“non-beneficiary students”), but success has been inconsistent. Given their locations, often hundreds of miles from another postsecondary institution, TCUs are open to all students, Indian and non-Indian, because we know that postsecondary education is *the* catalyst to a better economic future in rural America.

LOCAL TAX AND REVENUE BASE: TCUs cannot rely on a local tax base for revenue. Although tribes have the authority to tax, high reservation poverty rates, the trust status of reservation lands, and the lack of strong reservation economies hinder the creation of a reservation tax base. As noted earlier, on Indian reservations that are home to TCUs, the unemployment rate can well exceed 70 percent. By contrast, the national unemployment rate is currently 4.0 percent.

GROWTH OF TCUS

Since the enactment of the TCU Act more than 40 years ago, TCUs have never received the modest Congressionally authorized funding level (currently \$8,000 per Indian student). Yet, we are so close: an increase of \$10 million over the FY 2020 level is all that we need to fully fund TCUs for the first time *ever*. In the context of other federal programs, our request is quite modest. For example, the only other minority serving institution that receives operating funding from the federal government, Howard University, received \$205,788,000 for undergraduate programs in FY 2019, or about \$23,000 student, along with \$3 million for its endowment. We ask only for \$8,000 per student for the Title I TCUs.

Over the past 10 years, this Subcommittee has worked diligently to provide the extra resources needed to enable *all* TCUs to be funded on an academic year schedule. We are extremely grateful for this. The benefit to TCUs of being able to plan an annual budget and start the academic year with operating funding has been tremendous. Yet, during the time it took to provide this funding, *four* new TCUs became eligible to receive funding under Title I of the TCU Act: College of the Muscogee Nation (Okmulgee, OK), Red Lake Nation College (Red Lake, MN), Tohono O’odham Community College (Sells, AZ), and White Earth Tribal and Community College (Mahnomen, MN). Unfortunately, Title I funding has not kept pace with inflation, much less received increases sufficient to support new TCUs. For example, between FY 2014-2018, funding for the 28 Title I TCUs was flat despite the growing need for higher education across Indian Country. As we move forward, we are worried about TCU operating funding: at least three new TCUs could join the pool soon (Alaska Pacific University, California Tribal College, and San Carlos Apache College). The addition of these TCUs is important for Indian Country, but only if support is available to ensure that they can operate effectively.

CONCLUSION

TCUs provide quality higher education to thousands of AI/ANs and other rural residents and provide essential community programs and services to those who might otherwise not have access to such opportunities. The modest federal investment in TCUs has paid great dividends in terms of employment, education, and economic development and has significantly reduced social, health care, and law enforcement costs. Continuation of this investment makes sound moral and fiscal sense. We appreciate the Subcommittee’s past support of the nation’s TCUs and your thoughtful consideration of our FY 2021 appropriations requests.