

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

April 30, 2018

REQUEST SUMMARY

On behalf of the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), which collectively are the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), thank you for this opportunity to present our Fiscal Year 2019 (FY 2019) appropriations recommendations for the 29 colleges funded under Titles I and II of the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act (Tribal College Act); the two tribally chartered career and technical postsecondary institutions (Tribal College Act, Title V); the two Bureau of Indian Education postsecondary institutions; and the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA). The Bureau of Indian Education administers each of these programs, with the exception of IAIA, which is congressionally chartered and funded in its own account. The following is a list of recommended funding levels:

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

- \$86,354,000 to fund institutional operations under Titles I (\$68,544,000) and II (\$17,009,000), TCU Endowments (\$109,000) and technical assistance (\$701,000) authorized in the *Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act of 1978*, or Tribal College Act, which would fund 29 TCUs at the authorized level for the first time in 40 years and provide an additional \$100,000, for increasingly needed technical assistance. The technical assistance program has been level funded for 13 years despite growing demands for assistance for developing TCUs.
- \$10,000,000 for Title V of the Tribal College Act, which provides partial institutional operations funding for two tribally chartered postsecondary career and technical institutions.
- \$9,960,000 for the Institute of American Indian Arts.
- \$25,000,000 for Haskell Indian Nations University and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, the Bureau of Indian Education's two postsecondary institutions.
- \$31,000,000 for TCU Infrastructure Improvement, authorized under section 113 of the Tribal College Act.

OPPORTUNITY AND INNOVATION IN INDIAN COUNTRY

Tribal Colleges and Universities are essential to success in American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) education. Currently, 38 TCUs operate more than 75 campuses and sites in 17 states, within whose geographic boundaries 80 percent of all American Indian reservations and federal Indian trust land lie. TCUs serve students from well over 250 federally recognized tribes and 30 states. More than 85 percent of our students receive federal financial aid – primarily Pell grants. In total, the TCUs annually serve 160,000 AI/ANs and other community members through a wide variety of academic and community-based programs. TCUs are public institutions accredited 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 committed to improving the lives of its students through higher education

and to moving AI/ANs toward self-sufficiency. To do this, TCUs serve many roles in their reservation communities, functioning as workforce and job creation engines, community centers, public libraries, tribal archives, entrepreneurial, small business, and career centers, computer labs, summer camps, community farms and gardens, economic development centers, applied research hubs, child care centers, and more.

The federal government, despite its direct trust responsibility and binding treaty obligations, has never fully funded TCU institutional operations as authorized under the Tribal College Act. Despite funding challenges, TCUs are leading the nation in preparing an AI/AN workforce, including nurses, land managers, and teachers for our Native schools. For example, half of all AI/AN special education teachers in Montana are graduates of one college: Salish Kootenai College. TCUs prepare other professionals in high-demand fields, including agriculture and natural resources management, human services, IT, and building tradesmen. By teaching the job skills most in demand on our reservations, TCUs are laying a solid foundation for tribal economic growth, which is the *only* way to move tribes and tribal members to self-sufficiency. But workforce development is not enough. TCU leadership understands that 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, 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 one day will lead our tribal nations. Unacceptably, the high school drop-out rate for Native students remains around 50 percent. TCUs are reaching back to create a bridge for Indian students as early as the elementary school, encouraging them to stay focused on achievable goals and believe that the natural course is to 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 as a strategy for improving course delivery, host weekend academies, after school programs and summer camps for middle and high school students, and at the other end of the spectrum, offer GED or HiSET training and testing, and 2+2 partnerships to bridge programs with regional universities. All are solid steps to bolster the prospects for future of Native youth and breaking the cycle of generational poverty.

TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: A SOUND INVESTMENT FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND RURAL GOVERNMENT. Aaron Sansosie of Flatrock, AZ, is a U.S. Army veteran, father of four, and Navajo Technical University (NTU) student. He is one of thousands of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students gaining valuable education and technical skills to enter the workforce at Tribal Colleges. Aaron is enrolled in NTU's Carpentry certificate program and Building Information Modeling Applied Science associate's degree program. To achieve his goals, Aaron has been taking 17-19 credits each semester, which keeps his days busy. While the schedule may seem grueling for any student, it is important to note that

Aaron does this all while sleeping out of his truck. *“The cost of living here is pretty high, especially in the dorms and having three meals a day. Sometimes Pell won’t cover it all, which leaves me in debt. Even with my veteran benefits, which help me out a lot, [I need to save],”* explained Aaron, whose desire to help his family and community is powerful.

Stories like Aaron’s can be found across Indian Country as TCUs attempt to stretch federal dollars to meet the unique needs of AI/AN students. In fact, a 2015 economic impact study on the TCUs, conducted by Economic Modeling Specialists International (EMSI), revealed that for every federal dollar invested in the TCUs, the taxpayers receive a cumulative value of \$2.40. The average annual rate of return is 6.2 percent, a solid rate of return that compares favorably with other long-term investments. On an individual basis, TCU students see an annual return of investment of 16.6 percent, and the vast majority of TCU-trained workers remain in Indian Country and contribute to the local economy. TCUs benefit taxpayers through increased tax receipts and reduced demand for federal social services – a win all-round.

FUND TCU INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT AUTHORITY FOR FIRST TIME EVER (\$31 MILLION/YEAR): We urge Congress to finally fund section 113 (25 U.S.C. 1813) of the Tribal College Act, established 40 years ago, and create a TCU Infrastructure Improvement program for Tribal Colleges. A key mission of TCUs is to prepare AI/ANs and other rural community members to be self-sufficient members of the nation’s workforce. For TCUs to realize this goal, they need facilities to educate and train their students in a safe environment for 21st century jobs. Facilities construction and maintenance are needed at the Tribal Colleges, many of which have hazards such as leaking roofs, asbestos insulation, exposed and substandard wiring, crumbling foundations, and outdated computer labs. One TCU needs-assessment revealed a need of \$120 million to address current shovel-ready projects and rehabilitation needs at our nation’s 38 Tribal Colleges. We urge the Subcommittee to allocate a tiny portion of its increased funding allocation, resulting from the 2 year budget deal, to help meet the dire facilities and infrastructure needs of the TCUs.

CHALLENGES: INDIAN STUDENT COUNT, TAX BASE & GAMING MISCONCEPTIONS

ISC Formula and Non Beneficences: As noted earlier, the TCUs’ operations funding remains insufficient, and their 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 enrolled tribal members. Yet, approximately 15 percent of the TCUs’ collective enrollments are non-Indian students. While many TCUs do seek operating funds from their respective state legislatures for their non-Indian state-resident students (also referred to as “non-beneficiary” students) successes have been, at best, inconsistent. Given their locations, often hundreds of miles from another postsecondary institution, TCUs are open to all students, Indian and non-Indian, believing that education in general, and postsecondary education in particular, is a catalyst to a better economic future in remote areas.

LOCAL TAX AND REVENUE BASE: TCUs cannot rely on a local tax base for revenue. Although tribes have the sovereign 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 4.5 percent.

GAMING AND THE TCUS: Although several of the reservations served by TCUs have gaming operations, they are not the mega-casinos located in urban areas and featured in the broad-based media. Only a handful of TCUs receive regular income from the chartering tribe's gaming revenue, and the amounts received can vary greatly from year to year. Most reservation casinos are small businesses that use their gaming revenue to improve the local standard of living and potentially diversify into other, more sustainable areas of economic development. In the interim, where relevant, local TCUs offer courses in casino management and hospitality services to formally train tribal members to work in their local tribally run casinos.

Some form of gaming is legalized in 48 states, but the federal government has not used the revenues generated from state gaming as a justification to decrease federal funding to other public colleges or universities in those states. Some have suggested that those tribes that operate the handful of extremely successful and widely publicized casinos located in or near urban areas, should be financing higher education for all American Indians. And yet, no state is expected to share its gaming revenue with a less successful or non-gaming state.

APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST FOR FY2019

As noted earlier, the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act will be 40 years old this year. As we approach this significant milestone, it is disheartening to note that in 40 years, the TCUs have yet to receive the Congressionally authorized per Indian student funding level. A significant step toward adequate funding for the TCUs' institutional operating grants and technical assistance under Titles I and II in FY 2019 would require an increase of \$16,562,630 over the FY 2018 appropriated level. These TCUs, which serve some of the largest Indian tribes in the nation, have been level-funded since FY 2014. Since that time, the College of the Muscogee Nation (Okmulgee, OK) and Red Lake Nation College (Red Lake, MN) have become eligible for funding under Title I of the Tribal College Act, and several more could potentially gain eligibility in the next few years.

CONCLUSION

AIHEC Member institutions/Tribal Colleges and Universities provide quality higher education to thousands of American Indians and other reservation residents, as well as essential community programs and services to those who might otherwise not have access to such opportunities. The modest federal investment that has been made in TCUs has paid great dividends in terms of employment, education, economic development and has significantly reduced social, health care, and law enforcement costs. Continuation of this investment makes sound moral and fiscal sense.

We greatly appreciate the Subcommittee's past and continued support of the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities and your thoughtful consideration of our FY 2019 appropriations requests.