

**Statement of
Janine Pease-Pretty on Top
President
The American Indian Higher Education Consortium
and Little Big Horn College, Crow Agency, Montana
February 24, 1999**

I. Introduction

Chairman and Members of the Committee, on behalf of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) and the 32 Tribal Colleges that comprise AIHEC, thank you for this opportunity to share our comments on the President's budget for Fiscal Year 2000. You are aware, Tribal Colleges remain the most poorly funded group of higher education institutions in this country, however, our achievements have been nationally acclaimed. We strive to increase the delivery of quality higher education, as we respond to the mounting needs of the most remote and economically disadvantaged reservation populations. More support is desperately needed to comprehensively assess and address the complex issues Tribal Colleges face. Congress must take appropriate action to ensure that more consideration is given to the important role our colleges hold in society. We respectfully request that this Congress build upon the modest increases requested by the President in several key areas. We also strongly urge the Senate Indian Affairs Committee to hold a comprehensive hearing on Tribal Colleges.

My statement focuses on three areas: Department of Interior appropriations, which provide essential core funding for 26 institutions through the Tribally Controlled College or University Act; Department of Education appropriations; and Department of Agriculture appropriations for 30 of our member institutions, which are referred to as the 1994 Land-Grant Institutions.

II. Background on Tribal Colleges

In isolated rural communities throughout Indian Country, and even in a few towns and cities, this nation's Tribal Colleges are bringing higher education to more than 25,000 students from over 250 American Indian tribes. Since the first Tribal College, Diné College, was established on the Navajo reservation in Arizona 30 years ago, these vital institutions have come to represent the most significant development in American Indian educational history, promoting achievement among students who most likely would never know educational success. Important institutions were developed through the recognition of tribal leaders that only through local, culturally-based education institutions could American Indians succeed in higher education. It was also known that the Tribal Colleges, an exercise in self-determination, could help bring much needed economic development to reservations and would be essential in preserving tribal communities and cultures. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, the first Tribal Colleges were chartered on remote reservations by their respective tribal governments, to be governed by boards of local tribal people. In 1972, the first six tribally-controlled institutions came together to form the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). Today, AIHEC is a cooperatively sponsored effort on the part of 32 member institutions in the United States and Canada, and has become the premier national voice in Indian higher education. Tribal Colleges offer primarily two-year degrees, with some colleges offering four-year and graduate degrees. Since their inception, the Tribal Colleges have helped address the problems and challenges of our welfare system by providing adult education, job training, GED, and other college preparatory courses. Tribal Colleges also serve as community centers, providing libraries, tribal archives, career centers, economic development centers, public meeting places, and child care centers. We have done all

this because our missions require us to help move American Indians toward self-sufficiency and help make American Indians productive, tax-paying members of our society. Fulfilling this obligation has been a difficult challenge and will become even more difficult over the next several years, as Tribal Colleges continue to feel the impact of welfare reform. Already, our colleges are experiencing increasing enrollments due in part to many welfare recipients turning to the colleges for training and employment opportunities.

III. Interior Appropriations

The first and most critical priority of this nation's American Indian Tribal Colleges and Universities is to achieve sufficient and equitable appropriations for core operations and programs for the majority of our institutions which are supported under Titles I and II of the Tribally-Controlled College or University Assistance Act (P.L. 95-471). Title I funds 25 Tribal Colleges, and Title II funds Diné College. Known as the "Tribal College Act," this legislation provides funding on a per full-time Indian student count (ISC) basis and is administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Indian Education Programs. This per-student funding for Tribal Colleges, inadequate from the outset, has remained almost level over its appropriation history and has actually decreased in recent years. Core operational funding levels still only equal approximately half of the \$6,000 authorized level and 40 percent less than mainstream community colleges receive. Inflation has had a devastating impact on stagnant appropriation levels. In FY99, overall enrollment increases and the eligibility of an additional Tribal College absorbed the Tribal Colleges' meager \$1.4 million appropriations increase. The allocation per Indian student fell from \$3,017 in FY98 to \$2,964 in FY99 -- an decrease of \$53 per Indian student!!

Tribal Colleges have recently gained recognition from this Administration, in particular from the Office of Management and Budget. They have made an effort to learn firsthand what Tribal Colleges are all about and have requested several justifications for our funding requests. Over the past two years, the President's budget has shown more support for Tribal Colleges -- an attempt to rectify the fact that the Tribal Colleges have remained a low priority for the Bureau of Indian Affairs over our history. We hope Congress will build on the President's FY 2000 budget recommendation of a \$7.1 million increase for Titles I and II of the Tribal College Act. We respectfully request a \$10 million increase to bring the colleges slightly closer to their full authorization level. With an estimated full-time Indian student enrollment increase of seven to ten percent next year, a funding increase will raise per-student funding to \$3,827, still far below the amount needed and mainstream levels.

Despite the challenge of underfunding, all Tribal Colleges are fully accredited by mainstream accrediting agencies, with the exceptions of just a few colleges that are candidates for accreditation. The importance of core funding through the Tribal College Act has been underscored by warnings from accrediting agencies about the hazards of relying too heavily on a patchwork of small, competitive, and temporary grants. **Tribal Colleges find themselves caught in a vicious cycle: inadequate funding threatens their ability to maintain accreditation; yet, accreditation is required for most federal and private grant programs. Additional funding is desperately needed in this area to help maintain accreditation and to stabilize basic operational budgets.**

Another important funding concern is the state of Tribal College facilities. The Tribal College Act authorizes \$1.8 million for the facilities renovation. Facilities construction, maintenance and improvement are urgently needed at the Tribal Colleges, which, for the most part, are currently operating in abandoned, donated, or even condemned buildings. Hazards include leaking roofs, exposed asbestos and wiring, and crumbling foundations. Tribal Colleges have identified facility maintenance and renovation a high priority. We recommend that if more funding is garnered for

BIA educational facilities, Tribal Colleges will be a priority of this Congress. Full funding for the Tribal College Act facilities construction provision would allow for a small but essential allocation to help address the most urgent needs, but it would only touch the tip of the iceberg. We therefore ask Congress and the Department of Interior to seriously consider the overall facilities needs of our institutions and do what they can to address these needs.

AIHEC also supports the individually submitted requests of our affiliate members, funded under a separate authority in the Interior Appropriations bill. These include The Institute of American Indian Arts, Haskell Indian Nations University, Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute and United Tribes Technical College.

IV. Education Appropriations

Within the Department of Education Appropriations, we are specifically concerned with Titles III and V of the Higher Education Act, the restoration of Title IX of the Improving America's Schools Act and continued support for Indian programs within the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education and Applied Technology Act

Title III funding. The Aid for Institutional Development programs support minority institutions and other institutions that enroll large proportions of financially disadvantaged students and have low per-student expenditures. Tribal Colleges clearly fit this definition. With the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 1998, Tribal Colleges joined Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in garnering an authorization within the Title III program. Congress recognized that the Tribal Colleges are young, struggling, and most deserving of a separate section at a \$10 million authorization. The President's budget requested \$6 million for this section, however \$10 million is essential to fund a greater number of eligible Tribal College applicants. Even at full funding, this level is significantly less than the funding levels received by HBCUs and HSIs. While grant amounts would be less than a typical Title III grant, full funding could provide essential support to up to 30 of our member colleges.

All of the Tribal Colleges should benefit from Title III funding, and we know that the Tribal Colleges will use these funds to address basic infrastructure needs, enhance their facilities, support faculty and curriculum development, gain access to emerging technologies, and provide vital services to a growing number of students. **The Strengthening Tribal Colleges section of Title III, Part A (Section 316) will help Tribal Colleges meet these increasing developmental needs, and we urge you to build on the President's FY 2000 request of \$6 million and raise it to the full authorization level of \$10 million.**

Title V - Partnerships for Teacher Preparation. As part of this program, the President has committed \$10 million in FY 2000 to create a new American Indian Corps of Teachers (AICT). This Corps, aimed at producing 1,000 new teachers for schools serving American Indian students, would provide \$5 million for fellowships to college students majoring in education programs and \$5 million for professional development programs in Indian Country to support current teachers. We strongly urge Congress to ensure that Tribal Colleges are a priority within this proposal, and AIHEC supports the President's requested amount.

Greater Support of Title IX of Improving America's Schools Act. This title supports adult education programs for American Indians that are offered by state and local education agencies, and by Indian tribes, institutions, and agencies. The section has not been funded since FY95. As mentioned earlier, the Tribal Colleges provide adult education classes to their communities. The Tribal College Act does not include funding for remediation and adult basic education, as it only supports those students enrolled in postsecondary programs. It is alarming that early indications

show that Tribal Colleges will serve an increasing number of adult basic education students, as reservation communities struggle with high rates of illiteracy and the impact of welfare reform. The President's budget does not include funding for this Title, but the Tribal Colleges need a minimum of \$5 million to provide limited support for the ever increasing demand of basic adult education services. Without this minimum commitment, how can we even begin to sustain and build upon the vitally needed services for our adult student populations? This is a serious oversight of the Administration and greatly impacts our institutions

Perkins Act funding. Section 117 of the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act provides core operational support to our two tribally-controlled postsecondary vocational institutions (Crownpoint Institute of Technology and United Tribes Technical College) and should continue to be funded at \$4.1 million (FY99 level funding).

V. Agriculture Appropriations

Today, 137 years after enactment of the first land-grant legislation, Tribal Colleges, more so than any other institutions, truly exemplify the original intent of the land-grant legislation. The first Morrill Act was enacted in 1862 specifically to bring education to all the people and to serve their fundamental needs. Mr. Chairman, this is the definition and mission of the Tribal Colleges.

On behalf of the 1994 Land-Grant Institutions, we respectfully request full funding of the provisions of our 1994 authorizing legislation. The 1994 Institutions' appropriations request for FY 2000 is extremely modest when compared with the annual appropriations of other existing land-grant institutions. It is important to remember that ***total funding for the programs authorized for all 30 of the 1994 Institutions combined, only equals approximately the amount the Department of Agriculture allocates to just one state land-grant institution each year.***

Endowment Fund for 1994 Land-Grant Institutions. The President's budget requests \$4.6 million payment to the endowment fund. This endowment installment remains with the U.S. Treasury, and only the interest is distributed to the 1994 Institutions. Just as other land-grant institutions historically received large grants of land or endowments in lieu of land, this sum assists the 1994 Institutions in establishing and strengthening our academic programs in the areas of curricula development, equipment and instrumentation for teaching, and student recruitment and retention in food and agricultural sciences. As the endowment increases over time, it will provide each 1994 Institution with much needed assistance and *is not scored as budget outlay or authority.* We fully support the President's request.

Education Equity Grant Program. The President requested \$1.5 million for this program, a \$52,000 decrease from FY99. However, closely linked with the endowment fund, last year this program provided \$52,000 per 1994 Institution to assist in academic programs. Through the funding made available in fiscal years 1996 through 1999, the Tribal Colleges were able to begin to support vital courses and planning activities specifically targeted to meet the unique agriculture needs of our respective reservations. Some of the programs supported through these grants include: the creation of natural resource management courses; nutrition and dietetic programs; environmental sciences curricula; comprehensive horticulture programs; and courses on sustainable development, forestry, and buffalo production and management. We ask that last year's appropriation level be sustained at \$1.552 million. Services.

Extension Services. The President's budget reflected only a \$3.5 million request for extension activities (a modest increase of \$1.44 million). AIHEC recommends full funding of \$5 million in order to sustain and further develop much needed extension services on our respective

reservations. Although current land-grant programs at the Tribal Colleges are modest, our 1994 authorizing legislation is vitally important to us because of the nature of our land base. Already, we are using our extension grants to address the under-use and under-development of the 54.5 million acres that comprise American Indian reservations.

Tribal Colleges are addressing economic development through land use, as they enter into partnerships with 1862 land-grant institutions through extension services. This program represents an ideal combination of federal resources and Tribal College-state institution expertise, with the overall impact being far greater than the sum of the parts.

Additional funding to support such efforts is needed because extension services provided by the states on our reservations are woefully inadequate, and the Tribal Colleges need to fill that void. It is important to note that this program is not duplicative of ongoing extension activities, and that it will complement and build on the existing Indian Reservation Extension Agent program.

Institutional Capacity Building Grant Program. This competitive grant program, which requires a non-federal match, would provide the 1994 Institutions with the investment necessary to allow us to strengthen and more fully develop our educational infrastructure. As indicated earlier in my statement, construction, maintenance and improvement assistance is urgently needed at the Tribal Colleges. Many facility improvements are needed simply to provide American Indian students with the education necessary to fully compete in the modern agricultural world.

Research funding. With the passage of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998, the 1994 Land-Grant Institutions were authorized to conduct agricultural research. This authority, and its corresponding appropriation, is vital to ensuring that Tribal Colleges finally have the opportunity to become full partners in this nation's land-grant system of colleges and universities. Many of our institutions are currently conducting applied agriculture-based research, yet they struggle to finance this research and meet their community's other research needs. Some of the research in progress includes soil and water quality research; amphibian propagation; pesticide and wildlife research; range cattle species enhancement; and native plant preservation, for medicinal and economic purposes. This competitive program is authorized at "such sums as may be necessary," and the President's budget reflects only a \$667,000 request, however, this is far below the assistance the 1994 Institutions require. We therefore, are asking for an initial investment of \$10 million for our 30 member institutions..

VI. Conclusion

Tribal Colleges are efficient and effective tools for bringing education to American Indians. The modest federal investment in the Tribal Colleges has paid great dividends in terms of employment, education, and economic development, and continuation of this investment makes sound moral and fiscal sense. We desperately need help to sustain our programs and thrive in achieving our missions. No communities are in greater need of land-grant programs than American Indian reservations. We hope that you will continue to help us in our struggle to meet the needs of our communities.

Mr. Chairman, we appreciate your long-standing support of the Tribal Colleges and the support of all the Members of this Committee. We are extremely grateful for your commitment to bring self-sufficiency to our communities. We look forward to continuing a partnership with you and the Members of your Committee-- a partnership that will bring equal educational, agricultural, and economic opportunities to Native America. In addition to the budget recommendations we have outlined in our statement, we also respectfully request that a comprehensive joint hearing on the Tribal Colleges and their impact on Indian Country be conducted by the Indian Affairs Committee

and the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee as soon as possible.

Thanks you for this opportunity to present our views to the Committee on Indian Affairs and for your careful consideration of our recommendations.

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