

Statement of Elmer J. Guy, President, Navajo Technical College, Crownpoint, New Mexico and Chinle, Arizona, submitted to the Honorable Byron L. Dorgan, Chairman of the United Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

Honorable members of the Committee on Indian Affairs. My name is Elmer J. Guy, President of Navajo Technical College (Navajo Tech) that has two campuses on the Navajo Nation in Crownpoint, New Mexico and Chinle, Arizona. I am here today in partnership with Dr. David Gipp, the President of United Tribes Technical College (UTTC) located in Bismarck, North Dakota, in order to ask for support for a new Title V section to the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Act of 1978 (25 USC 1801, *et seq.*). This new title will authorize funds to tribally controlled postsecondary career and technical institutions.

Navajo Tech, like UTTC, has had a distinguished history in Indian higher education. In the famous 1969 report by the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare of the United States Senate, made by its Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, Indian education throughout the United States was found to be “a National Tragedy—a National Challenge.” The stark reality painted by the statistical and policy analysis in that report shocked the nation at that time. U.S. education policy toward American Indian people had not improved their lives and prospects for a better future. It had, instead, taken resources from the national treasury in a way that perpetuated an historical tragedy of major proportions.

I will let the able Dr. Gipp speak for his institution, of course. He is one of the most distinguished American Indian educators in the nation and has been so for a long period of time. But Navajo Tech was founded on the largest American Indian Nation, the great Navajo Nation, in the U.S. to help turn a tragedy into educational success.

Part of the challenge in the wake of the realization of the depth of the tragedy of Indian education in 1969 was to begin to discover how to use education and training as a tool to address the immediate needs of an unemployed population. In 1979 the Navajo Skill Center was founded to meet that critical need. Through the dedicated work of Navajo education leaders at that time, the Skill Center was a success. Unemployed Navajo citizens not only mastered vocational and technical skills, but they found jobs.

With a Navajo population of the time at over 150,000 people, this success was limited, however. There were a lot of reasons for this. Funding was limited; too few training and educational programs were available; student and trainee interests were broader than the curriculum; jobs in the Nation were limited and highly competitive; job requirements became more demanding as the national economy demanded higher levels of education, and dreams among students and Navajo educators were larger than the Navajo Skills Center structure could contain.

In 1985, in response to these new challenges, the Skills Center became the Crownpoint Institute of Technology. A new era was begun. The Institute began to expand its programming in order to offer associate degrees. It began to pay close attention to national trends as they related to careers and technical education. And, as was previously true, it began to succeed as it developed programs to meet the challenges present during the late 1980s and 1990s.

I am telling this history to make two points: 1) That Navajo Technical College has played a vital role in the effort by the United States Senate and government of the United States to address problems in Indian education that stretch back into U.S. history and 2) that, although it has not managed to meet even one half percent of the technical and career needs of the Navajo people living in New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah, it has been making slow progress on national education goals as they relate to American Indian people.

While Navajo Tech was the Crownpoint Institute of Technology it managed a number of significant achievements. It responded positively to the call for the nation's colleges and universities to begin working toward programs that would bolster the science, technology, engineering, and math competitive needs of the 21st century by developing impressive associate degree programs. It continued building its strengths in programs like culinary arts and automotive technology, sometimes keeping up with the knowledge revolution in career fields and sometimes ensuring that jobs, certificate, and degree priorities were aligned to achieve high job placement rates.

In 2005 Crownpoint Institute of Technology became Navajo Technical College, in part because of the expansion of services into the Arizona side of the Nation. Navajo Tech has maintained retention rates over time that exceed 60% of the student population using cohort analysis, besting a national community college retention rate of a little over 50%. It became a land grant institution in partnership with other tribal colleges in 1994. In 2005 it became fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association.

This does not mean that Dine College, the other tribal college on the Navajo Nation and Navajo Tech are coming close to meeting the Navajo people's higher education needs—although both institutions of higher learning provide absolutely vital educational services to the Navajo people. U.S. Census acknowledges a total of Navajo population of 225,298. On trust land alone, 106,432 Navajo citizens are age 18 and over. This population is spread throughout a 17,500,000 acre reservation (26,897 square miles) extending into three states. The Navajo reservation is 2,810 square miles larger than the State of West Virginia. The median Native American population age is 27.4 years, eight years younger than the median age for mainstream America. Approximately 10,000 Navajo students graduate from area high schools each year. Dropout rates from high school are as high as they are in the most challenging urban schools. Large percentages of

those Navajo students who graduate lack basic reading, writing, and math skills. Navajo Tech alone only serves a little over 500 full time equivalency students where it should be serving thousands if persistent poverty on the Navajo Nation is going to be ended before the 21st century ends.

In spite of the success realized by Navajo Tech, and the needs that I just brushed over with the lightest of touches—I will be glad to provide the Committee or staffers with more extensive statistics if that will be useful to your deliberations, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in 2002 began to zero out the budget for critically needed operational funds, the authorization for appropriations that enables Navajo tech is P.L. 84-959, “Vocational Training for Adult Indians.” This is part of the operational funding that Navajo Tech receives under the Indian Self-Determination Act Contract. Both colleges also receive U.S. Department of Education Funding under Section 117 of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act as part of its operational funding.

Through the wisdom of Congress and the deeply appreciated help of this committee and the Senators and Representatives from our home states, the BIA decision has been reversed every year since then, thus keeping both Navajo Tech and UTTC alive and providing services to their students. But the uncertainty and stress on communities, which read about the yearly drama in area newspapers and hear about it on area media, students, faculty, and staff damages Navajo Tech every single year. “Will Navajo Tech survive another year or not?” People say. “What’s wrong with the college if the Bureau of Indian Affairs wants to shut it down?” They say. Education is about the future, and when the future is clouded and troubles seems to always verge on creating disaster, then planning efforts go awry, key professionals look for other jobs, students question if they should make a decision that is in their best interest, and keeping everyday tasks going gets harder.

The truth is that Navajo Tech needs to stabilize its funding base. Without BIA and Carl Perkins funding, in spite of the discretionary and targeted funding the college is eligible to apply for, Navajo Tech cannot provided even the modest services that it now provides to the Navajo Nation and the people of the United States. We especially want to support the formula for funding between Navajo Tech and UTTC that will:

- Hold harmless the two schools at the higher of their 2006 or 2007 funding levels. We want to ensure that the two schools will not be funded at an amount less than the amount for their base year based upon Congressional appropriations.
- Distribute appropriations above the “hold harmless” level of the two institutions combined according to the Indian Student Count Formula used to distribute Section 117 Perkins Act grants.

- Ensure that the legislation passed includes a provision which provides that funding is continued to be made available pursuant to the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistant Act.
- Ensure that the two colleges will continue to receive the base funding they need from their sources of BIA and Perkins Act funding.
- Recognize that the Navajo Nation is largest American Indian nation in the country with by far the largest population base and should not therefore be limited to only one institution of higher learning to serve its people.

Therefore, with the greatest of respect for the members of this Committee, which number among Navajo Tech's greatest friends, we ask that you support the new Title V language before you so that we can end the uncertainty and provide stability to our college. We are hoping that you will, on a bi-partisan basis, help us to live up to our educational responsibility to current Navajo students, future students, and even unborn students of the future. The job identified in 1969 is still with us. We need to change the tragedy of Indian education into the success of Indian education. The United States needs us to succeed since our human resources are always our greatest asset. If we succeed all of us serve the American people well.

A further truth is that both Navajo Tech and UTTC are making strides in spite of the institutional stress and challenges we face because of the zeroing out of BIA funding every year. Again, I will let Dr. Gipp speak for his institution, but at Navajo Tech our enrollment is increasing. Our technology education program has become a world class program. It is currently in the process of developing an initiative called Internet to the Hogan that is using science and technology research in areas like high speed wireless connectivity and supercomputing and using those technologies to end the digital divide on the Navajo Nation. The Congress of the United States provided the funds through the National Science Foundation and other federal agencies to make the work we are doing possible. Navajo students are learning world class skills as a result of this project, and some of our graduates, both working at the college and elsewhere, are becoming leaders in research, education, and the entrepreneurial use of technology.

We are currently working hard with the Superintendent of Navajo Education, Dr. Tommy Lewis, to improve K-20 student performance in pre-college science, technology, engineering, and math skills, working on an answer to the problem of underperforming high school students. We are extending our service area, strengthening curriculum and increasing academic rigor in fields as diverse as nursing, automotive repair, electrical trades, and alternative energy. Title V will not provide solutions to all of the challenges that still must be overcome to end the national tragedy in Indian education that we have fought to overcome since 1969. More resources, fresh ideas, an entrepreneurial drive for excellence, and the kind of determination present in the students, staff, faculty, and administrators at Navajo Tech will all be needed. But the passage of this legislation will be an important step toward Navajo Tech's long-term future.