



**STATEMENT
OF THE
AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM**

**PRESENTED BY
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**OVERSIGHT HEARING ON INDIAN EDUCATION
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Chairman McCain, Vice Chairman Dorgan, and distinguished members of the Committee, on behalf of this nation's 35 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), which comprise the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), I thank you for extending to us the opportunity to testify today on issues of Indian higher education. I am honored to be here.

My name is Joe McDonald. I am a member of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes and for the past 28 years I have served as the president at Salish Kootenai College (SKC), which is located on the Flathead Reservation in northwestern Montana.

Salish Kootenai College was chartered by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribal Council in 1977 for a simple reason: the near complete failure of the higher education system in the United States to meet the needs – or even include – American Indians. SKC began as a branch campus of Flathead Valley Community College occupying office space donated by Polson School, offering 45 credits to 49 students at seven sites around the reservation. Today, SKC is one of the largest tribal colleges offering 4 bachelor's degrees, 14 associate degrees, and 7 certificate programs. The college employs 49 full-time and 60 part-time faculty and serves over 1,200 full- and part-time students.

Over the past 30 years, the idea of tribal institutions of higher education has spread rapidly throughout Indian Country. Today, despite decades of severe funding inequities and Federal budget cuts, 35 tribal colleges and universities in 13 states are educating upwards of 30,000 students from 250 Federally recognized Indian tribes.

This morning, I would like to first talk a little about the tribal college movement and some key issues in American Indian higher education. Then, I will offer some recommendations for how we might best address these issues.

I. BACKGROUND: THE TRIBAL COLLEGE MOVEMENT

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) are young, geographically isolated, and poor. None of our institutions is more than 37 years old. Most TCUs are located in areas of Indian Country that the Federal government defines as extremely remote. We serve our communities in ways far beyond college level programming, and are often called beacons of hope for our people. We provide much needed high school completion (GED), basic remediation, job training, college preparatory courses, and adult education programs. We function as community centers, libraries, tribal archives, career and business centers, economic development centers, public-meeting places, and elder and child care centers. In fact, an underlying goal of all tribal colleges is to improve the lives of students through higher education and to move American Indians toward self-sufficiency. This goal is important to us because of the extreme poverty in which most American Indians live. In fact, three of the five poorest counties in America are home to TCUs, where unemployment rates range from 50 to 75 percent.

We are the most poorly funded institutions of higher education in the country. And apart from the U.S. Military Academies and Howard and Gallaudet Universities, we are the only institutions of higher education whose basic operating budgets are funded – by legislative mandate – by the Federal government.

Most of our institutions are located on Federal trust land. Therefore, states have no obligation to fund tribal colleges. Most states do not even provide funding for the non-Indian state-resident students who account for 20 percent of our enrollments. Yet, if these same students attended any other public institution in the state, the state would provide that institution with basic operating funds. Ironically, TCUs are accredited by the same regional agencies that accredit state institutions.

Despite their strong support, our tribal governments are able to provide us with only modest financial support. Our tribes are not the handful of small and wealthy gaming tribes located near major urban areas; rather, they are some of the poorest governments in the nation. Only a handful of tribal colleges currently receive any revenue from tribal gaming. Gaming is not a stable or viable funding source for TCUs, nor should it be a factor when considering the funding of tribal colleges. And as you know, it is a very few casinos that are located in or near major urban areas that are realizing the vast majority of the highly publicized profits from Indian gaming.

Revenues from state run gaming operations far exceed revenues from Indian gaming. Although some form of gaming is legalized in 48 states, the Federal government has not used the revenue generated from state run gaming to justify decreasing Federal funding to state operated colleges or universities. The standards that apply to states and state operated higher education institutions should apply to tribes and tribal colleges. Unfortunately, it appears that this is not the case.

II. KEY ISSUES AND PROGRAMS IN AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION:

a. INSTITUTIONAL OPERATIONS & FORWARD FUNDING

Despite trust responsibilities and treaty obligations resulting from the exchange of millions of acres of land, the Federal government has, over the years, not considered funding of American Indian higher education a priority. Since 1981, when the Tribally Controlled College or University Assistance Act, or Tribal College Act, was first funded the number of tribally chartered institutions funded under Title I of

said Act has quadrupled, growing from 6 to 26 institutions and it is expected that three to five additional tribal colleges will be eligible for Tribal College Act funding in the near future. In addition to the increasing number of tribal colleges, enrollments of full-time Indian students have grown 348.2 percent between 1981 and 2005.

Owing to a greatly appreciated \$5 million increase in FY05 appropriations, the Title I colleges are receiving \$4,447 per Indian Student Count (ISC)¹ towards our institutional operating budgets. Although this is the highest per student level realized to date it is, after 24 years of funding, still only about 75 percent of the authorized level. To further illustrate the lack of adequate funding for operating the nation's tribal colleges, the current authorized level (\$6,000 per ISC) when considering inflation, has the same buying power as the initial FY 1981 appropriation, which was \$2,831 per ISC. Institutional operations funding for the oldest of the nation's tribal colleges, Diné College, is provided under Title II of the Tribal College Act. Established as Navajo Community College in 1968, Diné College has grown from one main campus in Tsaile, Arizona, to eight community-based campuses throughout New Mexico and Arizona and is funded on a "needs based" platform.

There are five additional tribal colleges that are authorized to receive their institutional operations from Federal sources other than the Tribal College Act. The one constant is that all lack adequate institutional operating funds and their reliance on timely annual appropriations to keep their institutions functioning and their doors open.

Forward Funding: Because tribal colleges are not forward funded, TCUs rely on their operating funds in real time. When an Appropriations measure is not signed into law by October 1 of any year, rather than receiving the funds to support their operating budgets for the year, TCUs receive small partial payments based on a series of continuing resolutions. When these payments are further delayed due to a protracted appropriations impasse, funding only trickles into the colleges. Tribal colleges, which already struggle with inadequate funding without these additional burdens, are hit particularly hard by budget impasses and the resulting delays in distribution of institutional operating funds. Compounding the issue further is the fact that costs are highest during the academic year.

On the face of it, the holdups due to impasses and the resulting continuing resolutions or even delays in the Department's distribution of operating funds after Congress makes them available, might seem easily remedied. However, the consequences have a cumulative effect that create even greater financial difficulties that grow exponentially, the longer the payments are left undistributed.

The necessary stop gap measures, such as short term loans, employed to keep tribal colleges operating only serve to further exacerbate the tenuous and delicate financial circumstances under which these institutions are continually forced to operate. The situations created by budget impasses or Department delays lead to strained relations with banking institutions and a lack of credibility with businesses in the colleges' respective communities. It creates a need to identify emergency lines of credit to secure daily

¹ ISC = full time equivalent Indian students – Indian students are defined as enrolled members of a Federally recognized American Indian tribe. NOTE: TCUs receive no Federal funding towards their operating costs for non-Indian students, which account for approximately 20 percent of their collective enrollments.

operational cash flow. These lines of credit come with burdensome interest rates that immediately cut into any increases that the colleges may realize once their Appropriations measures are enacted. Forward funding of these institutions would go a long way to mitigate this unfortunate cycle.

Delayed appropriations and timely distribution of funds, which are becoming the regular order, create an inability to properly plan and project operation funding needs, hamstringing long-range strategic planning, force heavier reliance on grants and soft-money funding, which is a noted concern of the accrediting agencies. In short, TCUs are forced into a credibility crisis with their faculty, staff, communities, and students.

b. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

- **Department of Education - HEA Title III Part A section 316:** Title III Part A of the Higher Education Act supports minority and other institutions that enroll large proportions of financially disadvantaged students and have low per-student expenditures. Tribal colleges clearly fit this definition. TCUs fulfill a vital role by providing access to quality higher education programs to some of the most impoverished areas of the country. Their programs are specifically designed to focus on the critical, unmet needs of their American Indian students and communities, in order to effectively prepare their students for the workforce of the 21st Century. A clear goal of the Title III program is to improve the academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability of eligible institutions, in order to increase their self-sufficiency and strengthen their capacity to make a substantial contribution to the higher education resources of the Nation.

TCUs are the youngest and least developed institutions of higher education in the nation. As such, they are the most in need of these funds yet, our funding level increases lag behind other programs, and we must struggle to submit competitive applications under the arduous requirements and volume of Title III Part A grants for the funds that are available. Many higher education institutions spend thousands of dollars on grant application preparation and submission. This is simply not an option for TCUs. In addition, the pool of eligible applicants for the TCU program is small and although new TCUs are emerging, the pool is expected to remain below 45 institutions for the foreseeable future. Creating a formula funded program would result in a win-win situation. Current applications submitted for Title III Part A competitive grants must have each of the required areas individually judged by application reviewers, by converting the TCU program to formula funding considerable administrative time and cost savings could be realized by the Federal government. For these reasons, the Department of Education supports formula funding for the Tribal College Title III development grants program.

- **STEM Programs – NSF TCUP:** If current trends continue, within the next few decades the shortage of U.S. scientists, mathematicians, engineers, researchers and computer science experts will reach a critical point. Unless all of this nation's institutions of higher education begin graduating significantly more students in science, technology,

engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields soon, we simply will not have the workforce needed to stay competitive in the global marketplace of the 21st century. In fiscal year 2001, the National Science Foundation (NSF) launched an initiative to help TCUs develop and expand high quality STEM education curricula and programs, with an emphasis on the leveraged use of information technologies. The program, now in its fourth year, enables TCUs to develop and implement critically needed and comprehensive institutional approaches to strengthen teaching and learning in ways that improve access, retention, and completion of STEM programs. Although some TCU faculty and students are able to conduct limited research through the program, the majority of funding is necessarily committed to providing remedial and basic STEM education programs and to strengthening linkages between the TCUs and K-12 feeder schools in an effort to address shortcomings in STEM education in the lower grades. Despite the shared need among all TCUs to strengthen and expand remedial and basic STEM education programs, not all TCUs have been able to participate in the NSF administered program. NSF is committing increasingly more of its resources toward expanding basic scientific research, strengthening graduate and post-graduate level programs, and funding STEM teacher education programs. Because the Department of Education's fundamental mission is to help strengthen the overall quality of education throughout *the entire* nation, we believe the TCU program currently housed at NSF would be better suited for administration by the Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, in conjunction with the Title III-TCU program. This is consistent with the placement of the Math Science Partnership program fully within the Department of Education after its initial establishment within NSF.

- **USDA Land Grant programs:** The first Morrill Act was enacted in 1862 specifically to bring education to the people and to serve their fundamental needs. Today, over 140 years after enactment of the first land grant legislation, the tribal colleges and universities, as much as any other higher education institutions, exemplify the original intent of the land grant legislation, as they are truly community-based institutions. In 1994, AIHEC institutions achieved Federal land grant status through the passage of the "Equity in Educational Land Grant Status Act." More than a decade later, tribal colleges and universities have yet to become full partners in the nation's land grant system, and so our potential remains unrealized.

The 1994 Land Grant Institutions have proven to be efficient and effective vehicles for bringing educational opportunities to American Indians and hope for self-sufficiency to some of this nation's poorest regions. The modest Federal investment in the 1994 Land Grant Institutions has already paid great dividends in terms of increased employment, education, and economic development. American Indian reservation communities are second to none in their potential for benefiting from effective land grant programs and as earlier stated no institutions better exemplify the original intent of the land grant concept than the 1994 Land Grant Institutions.

The current 1994 land grant programs are small, yet very important. It is essential that American Indians explore and adopt new and evolving technologies for managing our lands. We have the potential of becoming significant contributors to the agricultural base of the nation and the world.

The following is a summary of the five 1994 TCU land grant programs:

- 1) **Educational Equity Grant Program** – This program has provided approximately \$50,000 per institution to assist in establishing agriculturally focused academic programs. The program provides the only stable source of funding to support agricultural planning activities and courses specifically designed to meet the unique needs of each institution's respective reservation. The 1994 tribal college land grants are successfully using these funds to develop programs in natural resource management; nutrition; environmental science; horticulture; sustainable development; forestry; and buffalo production and management.
- 2) **1994 Extension Program** - In FY04, the 1994 Extension program suffered an almost 13 percent (12.97%) decrease, by far the largest percentage decrease of Smith Lever programs, as 1862 and 1890 programs received 99.41 percent of FY03 funding, a reduction of just 0.59 percent. Reductions in already sparse funding significantly limit the 1994 Institutions' ability to maintain existing programs and to respond to emerging issues such as food safety and homeland security, especially on border reservations. The 1994 Institutions' extension program is essential to addressing the needs of the remote reservation communities served by 1994 TCUs. Examples of program activities include: outreach to at-risk youth; business skills development for local agriculture entrepreneurs; native plant restoration and horticulture projects; environmental analysis and water quality projects; and nutrition projects aimed at addressing health disparities, such as high rates of diabetes among American Indian populations. FY05 funding for the 1994 extension program competitive pool is \$3,273,000.
- 3) **1994 Endowment Account** – The corpus of the endowment account remains with the U.S. Treasury, only the interest is annually distributed among the 33 TCU land grant institutions. These funds assist in establishing and strengthening academic programs, including agriculture curricula development, faculty preparation, instructional delivery systems, equipment and instrumentation for teaching, and experiential learning. Funds also are used to enhance student recruitment and retention in the food and agricultural sciences, and to address the critical need for improved facilities at the 1994 Land Grant Institutions. The amount of the latest interest yield distributed among all the 1994 land grant institutions was \$2,093,477.
- 4) **1994 Research Program** – This program was first created in 1998 with the passage of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act paving the way for the 1994 Institutions to participate in USDA's competitive research grants programs. This is an important step in becoming full partners in the land grant system. Some research areas where TCUs are making significant contributions to their communities include: a) land use patterns, preservation, and renewable use of the land; b) nutrition and health, particularly given the poor health and nutrition status of many American Indians; c) native plants and horticulture; d) water quality assessment; and e) bison production and management. TCUs are well suited to play a coordinating role in research areas targeted by the Department of Agriculture. In FY05, the 1994 research grants competitive pool is \$1,087,000.

- 5) **Rural Community Advancement Program (RCAP)** – RCAP includes a set aside to address tribal needs. Of these funds, Congress has provided about \$4 million for tribal college facilities construction and improvements grants, administered on a competitive basis. There remains an urgent need for facilities construction, improvement and maintenance at TCUs, several of which still operate at least partially in abandoned, donated, and even condemned buildings.

c. **STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY**

- **Adult Basic Education and Remediation:** The national high school dropout rate for American Indian students (30-65 percent depending upon which study one reads) is higher than any other group in the country – creating a tremendous need for GED preparation and other basic skills enhancement programs. To meet this need, although operating on shoe-string budgets and with little or no money from state-administered Federally funded adult basic education programs, most TCUs continue to offer adult education programs; yet, their efforts cannot meet the demand.

In fiscal year 1996, all Federal funding targeted to tribal and tribal college adult education, literacy, and GED preparation programs was eliminated. Thousands of reservation-based American Indians were left without access to these vitally-needed services, which for many were the first step toward employment and self-sufficiency. The elimination of the tribal set-aside program in FY1996 had a devastating affect on TCU program budgets. In my own state of Montana, funding to the seven Indian tribes in the state dropped from \$957,605 annually to just \$15,318.

To help TCUs meet the need for these vital services we propose that the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) within the Department of Education partner with TCUs to open the doors of lifelong learning and employment for American Indians in some of the poorest and most disadvantaged parts of our country. To fund this partnership, each fiscal year, \$5 million of total funds appropriated for Adult Education State Grants would be reserved for the Secretary to make awards to TCUs, as defined in Section 316(b)(3) of the Higher Education Act, and to provide technical assistant to such institutions through a national Indian organization with expertise in American Indian higher education. Awards would be used to develop and implement innovative and effective programs designed to enhance life skills and employability, through programs that provide adult basic education and literacy services, which may include workplace literacy programs; family literacy services; English literacy programs; and opportunities to American Indians and Alaska Natives to qualify for a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent.

- **Student Support Services:** Among institutions of higher education, TCUs have a disproportionate number of students in need of remediation and other services that can only be addressed through a sustained and comprehensive student support program. The fiscal year 2005 TRIO student support services (SSS) grants program competition resulted in 25 percent of TCUs that had SSS grants losing their program funding. The grant scoring cut off for those institutions that would receive an FY05 award was a

remarkable 99.33. Prior experience points, complexity of application, and lack of adequate resources, have kept many TCUs and other minority serving institutions from participating in these vital programs at the level needed. In order to provide opportunities for increased TCU and other minority serving institutions participation in Federal TRIO programs, we request that Congress and the Department of Education work with AIHEC and the other members of the Alliance for Equity in Higher Education to find a solution to more equitable program funding.

Additionally, the Department of Education has recognized that many TCUs face any number of challenges in operating a high-quality, accountable TRIO project, once they have received an award. These challenges include their large proportion of students eligible for TRIO services, limited financial resources, staff who must play multiple roles due to the small size of the institution, as well as high leadership or staff turnover resulting in a lack of continuity and a potential lack of knowledge and sophistication in managing, leveraging, and integrating Federal grants into the mission of an institution.

To help address these challenges, in September 2003, the U.S. Department of Education - Office of Federal TRIO Programs awarded supplemental grants to each of the TCUs that were administering a Student Support Services (SSS) project at that time, to help these institutions improve their overall administrative and management skills and capacity, and to ultimately increase the projects' capacity to retain and graduate students. Simultaneously, our own Salish Kootenai College (SKC) TRIO Training Institute received additional funds to support the collective efforts of these tribal colleges to improve their TRIO-SSS projects.

The SKC TRIO Training Institute, in close cooperation with AIHEC and the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) undertook a series of activities designed to strengthen the management, integration, accountability, and ultimately, the effectiveness of TCU-SSS projects. From the beginning, the partners committed to meeting the Department's expectations regarding compliance while also capitalizing upon this unique opportunity to help TCUs engage in discussions and planning to maximize the potential of Student Support Services in their overall retention and research efforts. Although we made great strides, funding of these efforts has been halted.

- **Financial Aid:** Tribal Colleges and Universities support the widely promoted concept of doubling the authorized maximum Pell grant over the span of the authorization. The importance of Pell grants to our students cannot be overstated. Within the tribal college system, Pell grants are doing exactly what they were intended to do—they are serving the needs of the lowest income students by helping people gain access to higher education and become active, productive members of the workforce.

d. **ACCOUNTABILITY - MEASURING OUR SUCCESS:**

AIHEC American Indian Measures of Success (AIMS) Initiative: New Federal accountability measures, such as Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART), are demanding more sophisticated data collection and reporting strategies. Since January 2004, AIHEC has been working on a major initiative to collect annual data on the tribal colleges and universities,

by establishing relevant indicators of American Indian success and developing and implementing a coordinated, streamlined, and comprehensive data collection instrument, which will include both qualitative and quantitative data. The AIMS instrument incorporates key elements of the current and revised BIA annual report, as well as vital information from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), other Federal data sources, and most important, new indicators that will measure, for the first time TCU success in ways that are relevant to American Indian communities. AIHEC has also approached the BIA-OIEP on a number of occasions to urge the Bureau to coordinate its data collection efforts with AIHEC, which would result in more efficient and accurate reporting of TCU progress and successes. The AIMS Data Collection Initiative advisory group includes a representative from the BIA, although participation by the Bureau has been tepid, at best.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS:

a. Legislative recommendations for HEA and TCUAA

- 1) **Expand and increase authority for the Tribal Colleges and Universities' Title III Part A Developing Institutions Program – to include formula funding:** Currently, Sec. 316 of Part A specifically supports tribal colleges and universities through two separate competitive grants programs: 1) a development grants program that awards 5-year grants, and 2) a single-year award program designed specifically to address the critical construction and infrastructure needs at tribal colleges. Changes that would be advantageous to the TCUs include:

Tribal colleges and universities would clearly benefit from a formula approach to their Title III development grants program, provided the formula reflects the needs of these unique institutions and the intent of the Title III - Strengthening Institutions program. However, TCUs are very interested in retaining a portion of annually appropriated TCU Title III program funding to continue the competitively awarded construction grants program that has been available to the TCUs through appropriations language since fiscal year 2001. Sec. 102 of S. 2539, a bipartisan bill introduced in the 108th Congress and referred to this Committee, includes language that would accomplish this recommendation.

- 2) **Create a new section under Title III Part A to establish Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs.** As earlier noted, currently the United States is trending towards a shortage of U.S. scientists, mathematicians, engineers, researchers and computer science experts. The nation's institutions of higher education must begin graduating more students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields or we will not have the workforce needed to stay competitive in the global marketplace of the 21st century.

To help remedy this impending shortage in the STEM related workforce, TCUs propose the creation of a new section under HEA Title III Part A to establish Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs that will allow for more efficient and effective application and administration of STEM related programs being conducted for the unique population of students at the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities and the Alaska Native Serving and Native Hawaiian-serving institutions.

To ensure broad participation by the limited number of TCUs, we propose a formula driven program, which would include the transfer of \$10 million from NSF (current funding level of TCU program) to the Department of Education. Because NSF is committing increasingly more of its resources toward expanding basic scientific research, strengthening graduate and post-graduate level programs, we believe the TCU program currently housed at NSF would be better suited for administration by the Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, in conjunction with the Title III-TCU program. This is consistent with the placement of Math Science Partnership program fully within the Department of Education after its initial establishment within NSF.

Because of the fluid pool of eligible Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian serving institutions, we propose a new competitive STEM program for these institutions. For the two initiatives, we propose an additional \$10 million be allocated from the Math Science Partnership program, due to the lack of participation in that program by adequate numbers of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian-serving institutions and schools.

- 3) **Continue TRIO Programs Technical Assistance:** As earlier noted, many TCUs face challenges to operating a high quality, accountable TRIO project. In September 2003, the U.S. Department of Education - Office of Federal TRIO Programs recognizing these challenges, awarded supplemental grants to each of the TCUs that were administering a Student Support Services (SSS) project at that time, to help these institutions improve their overall administrative and management skills and capacity, and to ultimately increase the projects' capacity to retain and graduate students. Simultaneously, the Salish Kootenai College (SKC) TRIO Training Institute received additional funds to support the collective efforts of these tribal colleges to improve their TRIO-SSS projects.

In the short time since the initiative was launched tremendous progress has been made in improving the accountability and overall effectiveness of SSS projects at TCUs. It is now critical, that the institutions be provided with additional focused support so that the changes begun are systematically integrated within the TCUs themselves, as well as the greater AIHEC community and organization. Therefore, we respectfully request that Congress encourage the Department of Education to extend for a minimum of two years, the funding for this TCU-SSS Initiative. Without such continued support, it is likely that the initial investment and much of the momentum of the 2003-2004 SSS-initiative will be lost, and the full potential that now exists will certainly not be realized.

- b. **Adopt AIMS instrument for accountability reporting:** Through capacity building in data collection and analysis at the tribal colleges, the AIMS data collection initiative will be a foundation for systemic reform that significantly increase and, for the first time accurately measures, American Indian success in higher education. We recommend that the AIMS data collection instrument be adopted as the primary reporting mechanism for all Federal programs seeking accountability in program management and for measuring American Indian success in higher education.
- c. **Technical Assistance Contracts:** It is well established that tribal colleges are unique institutions even in the context of other minority serving institutions and therefore it is

imperative that Federal TCU programs' technical assistance contracts be administered under an American Indian organization that has experience with tribal colleges and their reservation communities, and not simply a minority serving organization. To ensure that is accomplished, we request that language be included in all legislation regarding technical assistance contracts for TCU programs stating that "grants or contracts for technical assistance shall be awarded to an Indian organization, which the Secretary or Director finds is nationally based, represents a substantial Indian constituency, and has expertise in the field of Tribal Colleges and Universities higher education."

- d. **Agency Issues:** Tribal colleges and universities experience persistent challenges regarding some of our Federal programs and the agencies that administer said programs. In contrast, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has a stellar track record for working with us to make the most of our modest programs. It is the only Federal agency thus far to propose and implement a agency-tribal college liaison program and leadership group. This Committee has been a long-term champion of the tribal colleges and their quest for adequate funding and equitable treatment among higher education institutions. Many of the ongoing challenges of funding and program administration include progressive cuts to program funding in the President's annual budgets, delays in decisions to release appropriated funds to AIHEC or the colleges, and technical assistance deficiencies. These issues could be greatly reduced if the White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities was appropriately and adequately staffed with knowledgeable personnel that could address these chronic issues with the appropriate agency officials and resolve them through educating the agencies about the unique nature of TCUs and their programs. Currently, the TCUs derive little benefit from the existence of the WHITCU office. We request that the august Senate Committee on Indian Affairs exercise oversight of the workings and accountability of the Office of the White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities in fulfilling its directive to ensure that tribal colleges and universities are more fully recognized as accredited institutions, have access to the opportunities afforded other institutions, and have Federal resources committed to them on a continuing basis.

IV. CONCLUSION

Tribal Colleges and Universities bring high quality, culturally relevant higher education opportunities to thousands of American Indians. The modest Federal investment in the TCUs has paid great dividends in terms of employment, education, and economic development. Continuation of this investment makes sound moral and fiscal sense. Tribal colleges need stable funding sources and competent agency administration of our various programs to sustain and grow those programs and achieve our missions.

We greatly appreciate the long standing support of this distinguished Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to present our views and recommendations to help achieve equality in higher education and economic opportunities to Indian Country through the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities.