

## **Turtle Mountain Community College: Ongoing Challenges During COVID-19 Pandemic**

117<sup>th</sup> Congress – February 2021

Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), **Turtle Mountain Community College (Belcourt, ND)** received urgently needed funding to move classes online to the extent possible and begin to address tremendous digital divide challenges. We were also able to provide emergency grants, equipment, and tuition assistance to our students to help them stay enrolled in classes. As we continue to support students during this difficult time and plan for onsite classes, our needs are growing. To address current pandemic-related challenges and plan for an uncertain future, TCUs need your ongoing support.

### **CARES and CRRSAA Funds at Turtle Mountain Community College**

- Student Aid
- Safety/Sanitation
- IT Upgrades
- Classroom changes/physically distant
- Professional Development for distance learning
- Ongoing student support.
- Classroom lab equipment



Student Aid was provided for internet, food, utilities and other household needs. Students were all provided with laptops. Safety and Sanitation products were purchased such as PPE, Clorox 360 machines, and HVAC ionizers filtration systems. IT Upgrades included student, staff and faculty computers, servers and networks switches, storage, learning management system, wireless access points, security cameras and VPNs. Classroom changes/physically distant: Classrooms were upgraded with audio and video capabilities for distant learning. Storage units were purchased to store excess desks to allow for social distancing.



### **Ongoing Challenges at Turtle Mountain Community College**

- Emotional, Mental and Behavior Health Concerns
- Short grant period – too short for TCUs and Students
- Authorized uses need to be expanded to include construction
- Ongoing student support needs
- Faculty support needs
- Food insecurities

TMCC needs more counselors and support staff such as elders, to reach out to students to keep students motivated. To keep our students mentally, physically, and emotionally grounded through cultural and traditional ways. Need more time to complete proposed projects. Being isolated from peers and much of the outside world, our students and staff need more counselors to help with their emotional/mental well-being. If new construction was authorized, we could add on to buildings or build new infrastructure to ensure social distancing. Legislators need to recognize that TCU campuses are small and compact. Relative to many colleges and universities that have been in existence for 100-200+ years, they have only been around for 30 years or less.

### **REQUEST: \$24 TCU IT Service Fund: USDA – Rural Utility Service**

The ongoing pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide and homework gap and underscored the lack of broadband access across Indian Country. To address these deficiencies, Congress should establish a *permanent TCU IT Service Fund* within the existing (and previously under-used) **USDA-Rural Utilities Service Program**. An annual \$24 million set-aside for TCUs, which are the 1994 Land-grant institutions, is needed to cover ongoing equipment costs, maintenance and upkeep, infrastructure expansion, and IT staffing. If TCUs had adequate funding for IT service and infrastructure support, they would have already put in place many of the community-based mobile hot spots needed to address the “homework gap” on many reservations.



### **REQUEST: \$500 million TCU Construction Fund: DOI – Bureau of Indian Education**

A recent AIHEC survey of TCUs revealed a list of chronic facilities-related maintenance and rehabilitation needs, including student and faculty housing, classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. The TCUs have an estimated total need of \$489.75 million in deferred maintenance and rehabilitation and need \$837 million to fully implement existing master plans. A dedicated TCU deferred construction and maintenance/rehabilitation fund through the DOI-BIE would help meet the 21st century needs of *all* TCUs, including technology-enabled facilities; campus renovations; IT infrastructure; and facilities necessary for career, technical, and pipeline programs.

### **Turtle Mountain Community College: Facilities Needs -- Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation**

Academic classrooms and faculty offices are too small for social distancing, faculty offices do not offer privacy for counseling, no health center to support building occupants, old infrastructure needs critical mechanical and infrastructure upgrades to give the best indoor air quality. A cultural center is a critical infrastructure upgrade to allow staff, faculty, and students to grow, heal, and sustain themselves traditionally in the old ways of our Nation. Due to the harsh climate, roads, sidewalks, exterior steps and handicap ramps are worn from extremely low temperatures. Roads and crossings are hard on vehicles from the constant heaving and retracting of the aggregate. If these infrastructure upgrades could be in place we would have a safer, cleaner, and healthier campus life upgrades are critical to giving staff, faculty and students a better quality of on campus life.

- Touchless Accessibility
- Indoor Air Quality
- New Construction
- Sustainability
- Food Pantry/Year-Round Greenhouse
- Security Infrastructure
- Cultural Center