

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 23, 2018

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

As strong supporters of this nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), we thank you for your commitment to ensuring that all TCUs are now transitioned to an academic year funding schedule. Forward funding for TCUs has long been a priority, and we appreciate the funding included in the final fiscal year 2018 appropriations bill that has made this goal a reality. We request that you build on this progress by providing strong funding for institutional operations and technical assistance under the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act [25 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.] for the 31 TCUs funded under Titles I, II, and V of the Act. Strong funding would allow the institutions to continue offering culturally grounded, high quality postsecondary education opportunities to American Indians and Alaska Natives in some of the poorest and most geographically-isolated regions of the country.

Tribal Colleges and Universities not only provide postsecondary education and workforce training opportunities, but serve as public cultural and community centers and as primary employers for their respective communities. TCU students are often older than the traditional college student, including single heads of households that are seeking a means to move off welfare or out of dead-end jobs to provide a better future for their families. TCUs offer their students a chance to succeed in furthering their education while continuing to attend to their family and community responsibilities.

Funding for the basic institutional operations of the tribally chartered institutions funded under Title I of the Act is enrollment driven, based on a per Indian student allocation, known as the Indian Student Count (ISC). For the purposes of allotting these funds, only those students who are enrolled members of a federally recognized tribe or the biological child of a tribal member may be counted. Unlike other public higher education institutions, because TCUs are located on federal trust lands, states have no obligation to fund these institutions. Most states, in fact, do not provide any funding for a TCU's operating budget for the non-Indian state-resident students that account for approximately 15 percent of overall TCU enrollments. Consequently, federal support is critically important as the primary means to fund institutional operating budgets and their unique and growing technical assistance needs.

In the 40 years since the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act was enacted, the number of TCUs has increased fivefold and full-time Indian student TCU enrollments have increased by more than 300 percent—including students from more than 250 federally recognized tribes at more than 75 locations, in 17 states. Despite their impressive growth, TCUs remain chronically underfunded, causing persistent issues for recruiting and retaining qualified faculty and staff, and maintaining accreditation.

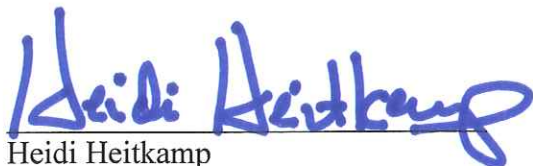
Support for TCU institutional operating budgets has yet to reach the authorized level, nor has it kept up with inflation. For the current academic year, the Title I funded institutions received \$7,285 per Indian student towards operations, yet were authorized to receive \$8,000 per Indian student. If today, Congress appropriated the authorized funding level for these colleges, the buying power would exceed the initial appropriation by less than \$70, when considering inflation.

Inadequate funding impedes these institutions from having the necessary resources to enhance their programs in response to the changing needs of their students and the communities they serve. Technical assistance funds – appropriated at the same level since FY 2006 – remain critically important to effectively address the unique and growing technical assistance issues across all tribal colleges and therefore, should also be increased.


Earlier this year, the Senate unanimously adopted a bipartisan resolution designating the week beginning February 12, 2018, as "National Tribal Colleges and Universities Week" recognizing the importance of these vital institutions. Every day, we witness the extraordinary differences TCUs make to improve the lives of tribal and non-tribal students and families in their communities. These institutions are positive agents of change and the key to a brighter future for Indian country. They have proven to be a solid investment of federal dollars and deserve our strong support.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's past support of TCUs, and we look forward to working with you to continue this critical investment in tribal higher education. Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,



Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



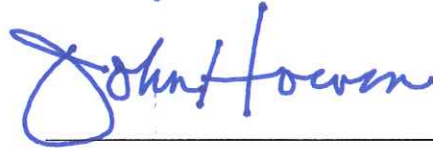
Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



John Hoeven
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



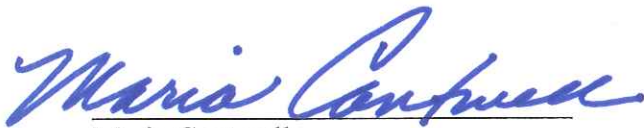
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



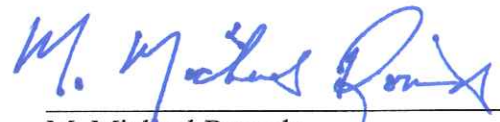
Tina Smith
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator