

THE AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM
SUBMITTED TO THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY – NATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
April 6, 2015

I. REQUEST SUMMARY

On behalf of the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) that collectively are the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), thank you for this opportunity to present our Fiscal Year 2016 (FY 2016) appropriations request with regard to the Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Minority Serving Institutions Partnership Program (MSIPP). Included in the FY 2016 Budget is an added \$4.6 million for a targeted Tribal Colleges and Universities initiative within the NNSA-MSIPP. This initiative will help to meet a primary objective of the MSIPP, by focusing on advancing the TCUs' opportunities to engage in collaborative research projects throughout the NNSA complex and future workforce development.

II. NNSA-MSIPP TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES INITIATIVE

The added \$4.6 million included in the Fiscal Year 2016 budget will launch a Tribal Colleges and Universities initiative designed to educate, train, and develop researchers, engineers, and technicians that will expand and diversify the STEM workforce in important technology growth areas, such as advanced manufacturing and energy efficient materials development. The project will focus on capacity building at TCUs in these growth areas and on facilitating TCU research partnerships with NNSA's National Laboratories and their industry partners. In addition to furthering the science mission of the Department of Energy, activities supported through this program will encourage Native students to pursue science and technology careers resulting in a sustainable career pipeline for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students in science and technology fields that are emerging as key drivers of the U.S. and global economies.

A key goal of the 2013 Federal STEM Education Strategic Plan is to better serve groups historically underrepresented in STEM fields and to increase the number of underrepresented minorities and women that graduate with STEM degrees. The proposed TCU program provides an important opportunity to help address simultaneously, the national need for a strengthened STEM workforce as well as the need to respond to the underrepresentation of American Indians and Alaska Natives in that workforce. Increasing the participation of underrepresented minorities in science and engineering must be at the center of our overall approach to sustaining our capacity to conduct research and to innovate. This new \$4.6 million initiative is a modest but solid step toward achieving these important goals.

III. BACKGROUND ON TCU: "DOING SO MUCH WITH SO LITTLE"

Tribal Colleges and Universities are an essential education component for American Indians/Alaska Natives (AIs/ANs). Currently, 37 TCUs operate more than 75 campuses and sites in 16 states, within whose geographic boundaries 80 percent of all American Indian reservations and federal Indian trust land lie. They serve students from well over 250 federally recognized tribes, more than 70 percent of whom receive federal financial aid. In total, the TCUs annually

serve about 89,000 AI/ANs through a wide variety of academic and community-based programs. TCUs are public institutions accredited by independent, regional accreditation agencies and like all U.S. institutions of higher education must periodically undergo stringent performance reviews to retain their accreditation status. Each TCU is committed to improving the lives of its students through higher education and to moving AI/ANs toward self-sufficiency. To do this, TCUs must fulfill additional roles within their respective reservation communities functioning as community centers, libraries, tribal archives, career and business centers, economic development centers, public meeting places, and child and elder care centers.

The federal government, despite its direct trust responsibility and binding treaty obligations, has never fully funded the TCUs' institutional operating budgets, authorized under the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act of 1978. In fact, TCU operating support is well below the level received by other institutions of higher education. The Administration requests and Congress appropriates approximately \$200 million annually towards the institutional operations of Howard University (exclusive of its medical school), *the only other Minority Serving Institution (MSI) that receives institutional operations funding from the federal government*. Howard University's current federal operating support exceeds \$20,000/student, because this is the level of need as determined by the U.S. government. In contrast, most TCUs receive \$6,355/Indian Student (ISC) under the Tribal College Act, less than 80 percent of the authorized level. TCUs have proven that they need and have earned an investment equal to -- at the very least -- the congressionally authorized level of \$8,000/Indian student. It is important to understand that we are by no means suggesting that our sister MSI, Howard University does not need or deserve the funding it receives; it does. We are only pointing out that the TCUs also need and deserve adequate institutional operations funding; however, TCU operating budgets remain chronically underfunded.

TCU budgets are at a further disadvantage, because these colleges receive funding for only about 76 percent of their enrolled students. Almost every other U.S. institution of higher education receives institutional operations funding based on its entire student body. However, it is important to note that although approximately 24 percent of the TCUs' collective enrollments are non-Indian students living in the local community, TCUs receive federal funding based only on AI/AN students, defined as members of a federally recognized tribe or the biological children of an enrolled tribal member. While many TCUs do seek funding from their respective state legislatures for their non-Indian, state-resident students (oftentimes referred to as "non-beneficiary" students) successes have been inconsistent, at best. Yet, if a TCU's non-beneficiary students attended any other public institution in the state, the state would provide the college with ongoing funding toward its day-to-day operations. Given their locations, often hundreds of miles from another postsecondary institution, TCUs are open to all students, Indian and non-Indian, believing that education in general, and postsecondary education in particular is a catalyst to a better economic future for their areas.

IV. FURTHER JUSTIFICATIONS & FACTS

- a) TCUs provide access to valuable postsecondary education opportunities that can lead to lucrative career choices and paths to brighter futures. Tribal Colleges and Universities provide access to higher education for American Indians and Alaska Natives and others living in some of the nation's most rural and economically depressed areas. In fact, seven of

the nation's 10 poorest counties are home to a TCU. The American Community Survey/ U.S. Census Bureau reported the annual per capita income of the U.S. population as \$28,184. However, the annual per capita income of AI/ANs is reported to be \$16,777, or 40 percent lower than that of the general population. TCUs offer their students a high level of support and guidance to bolster their chances of achieving academic success. In addition to serving their student populations, these tribal institutions offer a variety of much-needed community outreach programs.

- b) TCUs are producing a Native workforce that includes highly trained AI/AN teachers, tribal government leaders, nurses, engineers, computer programmers, and other much-needed professionals. By teaching the job skills most in demand on their reservations, TCUs are laying a solid foundation for tribal economic growth, with benefits for surrounding communities and the nation as a whole. In contrast to the high rates of unemployment on many reservations, graduates of TCUs are employed in "high demand" occupational areas such as Head Start teachers, elementary and secondary school teachers, agriculture and land management specialists, and nurses/health care providers. Just as important, the vast majority of TCU graduates remains in their tribal communities, applying their newly acquired skills and knowledge where they are most needed.
- c) Growing number of TCUs - Compounding existing funding disparities is the fact that although the numbers of TCUs and students enrolled in them have dramatically increased since they were first funded, appropriations have increased at a disproportionately low rate. Since 1981, the number of TCUs has happily, more than quadrupled and continues to grow; the number of AI/AN students enrolled has risen over 355 percent. In the past 10 years, six additional TCUs have become accredited and eligible for funding under Title I of the Tribal College Act, and there are several more colleges currently in the pipeline. TCUs are in many ways victims of their own successes. The growing number of tribally chartered colleges and universities and increasing enrollments have forced TCUs to slice an already inadequate annual funding pie into even smaller pieces.
- d) Local Tax and Revenue Bases - TCUs cannot rely on a local tax base for revenue. Although tribes have the sovereign authority to tax, high reservation poverty rates, the trust status of reservation lands, and the lack of strong reservation economies hinder the creation of a reservation tax base. As noted earlier, on Indian reservations that are home to TCUs, the unemployment rate can well exceed 70 percent. By contrast, the national unemployment rate is currently 5.5 percent.
- e) Gaming and the TCUs - Although several of the reservations served by TCUs have gaming operations, these are not the mega-casinos located in proximity to urban outlets and featured in the broad-based media. Only a handful of TCUs receive regular income from the chartering tribe's gaming revenue, and the amounts received can vary greatly from year to year. Most reservation casinos are small businesses that use their gaming revenue to improve the local standard of living and potentially diversify into other, more sustainable areas of economic development. In the interim, where relevant, local TCUs offer courses in casino management and hospitality services to formally train tribal members to work in their local tribally run casinos.

Some form of gaming is legalized in 48 states, but the federal government has not used the revenues generated from state gaming as a justification to decrease federal funding to other public colleges or universities. Some have suggested that those tribes that operate the few extremely successful and widely publicized casinos should be financing higher education for all American Indians. And yet, no state is expected to share its gaming revenue with a less successful or non-gaming state.

V. CONCLUSION

TCUs provide quality higher education to many thousands of AIs/ANs and other reservation residents, as well as essential community programs and services to those who might otherwise not have access to such opportunities. The modest federal investment that has been made in TCUs has paid great dividends in terms of employment, education, and economic development. Continuation of this investment and expanding it into the energy arena to increase the number of Native students engaged in STEM programs and focusing on careers in STEM related fields makes sound moral and fiscal sense. We greatly appreciate your past and continued support of the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities and your thoughtful consideration of our FY 2016 appropriations requests.