

STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**TRIBAL COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LEADERS SAY, THE IMPACT OF SEQUESTRATION  
WILL “CRIPPLE” AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS, BE “CATASTROPHIC” TO INDIAN COUNTRY**

***AIHEC President/CEO Urges Congress to Uphold the Federal Government’s  
Trust Responsibility and Treaty Obligations, Despite Looming Budget Cuts***

Today, leaders from the nation's 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)—including presidents, administrators, and faculty—are calling on federal lawmakers to protect more than 88,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students and community members served by TCUs from the deep across-the-board cuts, known as sequestration. Automatic cuts equaling \$85 billion, set to begin today, March 1, will have a devastating impact on TCUs and tribal communities across the country.

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), the collective spirit and unifying voice of the TCUs, issued the following statement today from its president and CEO, Carrie L. Billy:

"Sequestration undermines the trust, treaty, and statutory obligations to American Indian tribal governments. It is a travesty to democracy and could be cataclysmic for American Indian higher education, which impacts every aspect of life in our nation's tribal communities and reservations. Given the nation's unique relationship, responsibility, and the promise of this Administration and many in this Congress to respect and expand tribal sovereignty, we believe a cut of this magnitude and issued in this manner is not only irresponsible, it is unconscionable. It will be catastrophic to TCUs, which have been operating since their inception on austere budgets. TCU students and communities that rank among the poorest in the nation will see a significant drop in student financial aid; support services (including daycare and tutoring); administrative resources, courses, and training; degree programs offered; and community outreach activities and services.

"Over the past 40 years—operating on shoe-string budgets—TCUs have been making slow but steady progress through culturally-relevant and community-based higher education to address the socio-economic challenges that have plagued American Indian communities for more than two centuries. Now, the nation's 37 TCUs will experience across-the-board cuts as a result of sequestration, to programs and budgets that have no fat to trim. This indiscriminate cutting of federal funds is short-sighted and will have a long-term negative impact on the investment made in tribal higher education. Native people deserve a real chance to succeed in postsecondary education—particularly in those programs offered by TCUs—because they understand that earning a degree or credential allows them and their communities to reap short- and long-term life and societal benefits.

"To be clear, we are not seeking any handouts. We are only asking that Congress find a solution that avoids doing away with programs and services on which the nation's only tribal institutions of higher education and their American Indian students rely. It is not too late. Congress has until March 27, before the continuing resolution that is keeping the government functioning expires. We strongly urge



Congress to put the American people first, and work out a plan to responsibly address the nation's economic deficit, and in doing so, uphold and honor the federal responsibility to meet the higher education needs of American Indian students, rather than establish additional access and success barriers to this historically underserved population."

The following are a few examples to illustrate the effects of this first seven-month phase of sequestration on TCUs:

- **Sitting Bull College**, on the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in North Dakota and South Dakota, faces a cut of nearly \$1 million. In addition to shifting health insurance costs to employees, freezing salaries, and eliminating planned COLAs, the college will be forced to close its doors this summer, which means the elimination of programs for high school and middle school students and the potential cancellation of the college's annual Lakota Language Summit, at a time when Native languages are threatened with extinction.
- **Fort Peck Community College**, on the remote Fort Peck reservation in northeastern Montana, will be forced to close its community-based Wellness Centers in both Poplar and Wolf Point, eliminate its GED and Adult Basic Education program, and end extracurricular activities for students. These cuts could trigger a devastating domino effect since American Indians have higher high school drop-out rates and higher mortality rates from diabetes, accidents, liver disease, suicide, homicide, and chronic liver disease compared with other racial and ethnic groups.
- **Little Big Horn College**, in Crow Agency, Mont., will lose \$225,000 from its basic institutional operations budget, which translates to the loss of two faculty positions and the elimination of its summer session. Students who need to meet requirements to complete their associate's degree programs will now require more time to graduate, increasing costs to students, families, and the federal government. The college is also considering a four-day summer work week, essentially cutting staff incomes by 20 percent. For the hard working staff at the college—some of whom are single parents and many of whom support extended families—a cut of this magnitude goes far beyond eliminating luxuries. It means the elimination of food, gas, and daycare.
- **College of Menominee Nation**, in Keshena, Wis., faces a cut of \$1.1 million, which equates to the loss of funding for 35 employees, the projected loss of 100 or more American Indian students, and the elimination of some courses of study—crippling the economic growth potential of this small, rural community.
- **Ilisagvik College** in Barrow, Alaska—one of the most remote and isolated parts of the country—would experience a cut of \$355,000. This will directly impact the college's Student Success Center activities, including tutors, learning center staff, and student support services. The college will also be analyzing their distance education costs, teacher education programs, and library services, which are in all eight communities across Alaska's North Slope. Ilisagvik's thriving Extension program and summer camp bridging programs for Native Alaskan youth are also threatened by these cuts. "It would be a real disaster if we were to lose these funds," said Pearl Brower, Ilisagvik College president.

For more information about AIHEC, visit the organization's website at [www.aihec.org](http://www.aihec.org).

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#### **About the American Indian Higher Education Consortium**

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) is the collective spirit and unifying voice of our nation's 37 TCUs—a unique community of tribally and federally chartered public institutions of higher education working to make a difference in the lives of many thousands of Native American students, their families, and their communities. AIHEC, celebrating its 40th year as the sole national organization governed by TCUs, serves its member institutions through advocacy, data collection and research, and program initiatives, and advances public policy to ensure strong tribal nation's through excellence in American Indian higher education.