



Ahniwake Rose
President & CEO

MEMBERSHIP:

ALASKA

Ilisaġvik College

ARIZONA

Diné College
San Carlos Apache College
Tohono O'odham Community College

CALIFORNIA

California Indian Nations College
California Tribal College

KANSAS

Haskell Indian Nations University

MICHIGAN

Bay Mills Community College
Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College
Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College

MINNESOTA

Leech Lake Tribal College
Red Lake Nation College
White Earth Tribal and Community College

MONTANA

Aaniih Nakoda College
Blackfeet Community College
Chief Dull Knife College
Little Big Horn College
Fort Peck Community College
Salish Kootenai College
Stone Child College

NEBRASKA

Little Priest Tribal College
Nebraska Indian Community College

NEW MEXICO

Institute of American Indian Arts
Navajo Technical College
Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute

NORTH DAKOTA

Cankdeska Cikana Community College
Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College
Sitting Bull College
Turtle Mountain College
United Tribes Technical College

OKLAHOMA

College of the Muscogee Nation

SOUTH DAKOTA

Oglala Lakota College
Sinte Gleska University
Sisseton Wahpeton College

WASHINGTON

Northwest Indian College

WISCONSIN

College of Menominee Nation
Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa University

February 19, 2025

The Honorable Douglas Burgum

Secretary

Department of the Interior

1849 C Street, NW

Washington, DC 20240

RE: Exempt Haskell Indian Nations University and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute from Any Reduction in Workforce or Federal Hiring Freeze

Dear Secretary Burgum,

On behalf of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) and the 34 accredited Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) we represent, I write to express deep concern over the recent terminations of probationary employees at Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) in New Mexico and Haskell Indian Nations University (HINU) in Kansas. These federally operated institutions, administered by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) at the Department of the Interior, are experiencing severe workforce reductions following the implementation of Executive Order (EO) 14210, Implementing the President's "Department of Government Efficiency" Workforce Optimization Initiative, and the accompanying memorandum issued by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on January 20, 2025. These federal directives have mandated an immediate hiring freeze and the termination of probationary employees, resulting in a devastating impact on the ability of these institutions to serve American Indian and Alaska Native students and communities effectively.

SIPI and HINU are essential institutions that provide culturally relevant higher education opportunities for Native students. Together, these institutions serve over 1,375 American Indian and Alaska Native students from over 170 federally recognized Tribal Nations, offering nine (9) certificate, 23 associate, and four (4) bachelor's degree programs essential to Tribal workforce development and self-determination. However, as a result of EO 14210 and the hiring freeze, SIPI and HINU have already suffered substantial staff reductions, with 27 percent of HINU's workforce and 24 percent of SIPI's workforce terminated, including vital instructors, support staff, and key leadership positions. Additionally, an estimated 25 percent of BIE staff responsible for providing essential educational support to these institutions may also be impacted.

The immediate consequences of these terminations are alarming. The abrupt reduction in workforce places both SIPI and HINU at significant risk of losing



their accreditation. This scenario would have long-term consequences for students, funding, and institutional sustainability. The loss of faculty and support staff will severely disrupt student services, including course offerings, academic advising, career counseling, meal services, and financial aid assistance, which are critical to student retention and success. Without urgent intervention, the ability of these institutions to fulfill their mission and serve Native students will be severely damaged.

AIHEC urges immediate action to protect federal employees at SIPI and HINU, essential institutions fulfilling the federal government's trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations. Ongoing workforce reductions violate these commitments, and reinstating terminated employees is crucial for institutional stability. AIHEC calls for a formal statement opposing the terminations and an exemption from EO 14210 for HINU, SIPI, and BIE personnel.

Please let us know how we can work together to protect these institutions and the students they serve. Thank you for your leadership and attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ahniwake Rose", is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Ahniwake Rose
President and CEO
American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC)



CC:

Lisa Murkowski, Chairman, Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

Brian Schatz, Vice Chairman, Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

Jeff Hurd, Chair, House Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs

Teresa Leger Fernandez, Ranking Member, House Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs

Mike Simpson, Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Chellie Pingree, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Lisa Murkowski, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies