



STATEMENT
OF THE
AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM
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HEARING ON S. 633
*THE TRIBAL HEALTH PROMOTION AND TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
ADVANCEMENT ACT OF 2009*
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
APRIL 2, 2009

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, on behalf of my institution, the College of Menominee Nation in Keshena, Wisconsin, and the 35 other Tribal Colleges and Universities that compose the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, thank you for inviting us to be here today to testify regarding S. 633, the Tribal Health Promotion and Tribal Colleges and Universities Advancement Act of 2009.

My name is Linda Taylor. I am Dean of Nursing at the College of Menominee Nation in Keshena Wisconsin, and it is an honor to speak with the members of this Committee about Tribal Colleges and the work we are doing to transform Indian Country. We are also grateful to have the opportunity to thank you in person, Mr. Chairman, for your tremendous work on behalf of all Native people. I would also like to thank Senator Tester for his leadership in sponsoring S. 633, the Tribal Health Promotion and Tribal Colleges and Universities Advancement Act of 2009. We are pleased that he has taken the initiative to introduce this legislation so early in the 111th Congress and that the Committee has so expeditiously scheduled a hearing.

This afternoon, I will speak briefly on three topics: The Tribal College Movement; the need for enactment of S. 633; and finally, additional provisions that we hope can be included in S. 633 to accomplish the original intent of Senator Tester's legislation. I ask that my written statement be included in the Hearing Record.

BACKGROUND: THE TRIBAL COLLEGE MOVEMENT

Mr. Chairman, you and the members of this Committee are well acquainted with Tribal Colleges and Universities. Perhaps no one other than the Tribal College presidents and students knows better of our near daily struggles to survive as the most poorly funded institutions of higher education in the country. You also know of our tremendous successes, from our work to build self esteem and change the life and future of a student through a nurturing educational environment that is culturally-based and relevant to that student, to our efforts to build stronger and more prosperous Tribal nations through the restoration of our languages, applied research on issues relevant to our land and our people, workforce

training in fields critical to our reservation communities, and community-centered economic development and entrepreneurial programs.

American Indian tribally controlled colleges and universities are young, geographically isolated, poor, and almost unknown to mainstream America. They are also amazingly bright catalysts for revitalization and change -- so much so that Tribal Colleges are often called "higher education's best kept secret."

Located in some of the most rural and impoverished regions of this country, Tribal Colleges are planting resilient seeds of hope for the future; nurturing and sustaining languages, cultures, and traditions; and helping to build stronger tribal economies and governments. Yet, the oldest Tribal College is younger than many of the people in this room. Our oldest institution, Diné College on the Navajo Nation, just turned 40 last year.

The Tribal College philosophy is simple: to succeed, American Indian higher education needed to be locally and culturally based, holistic, and supportive. The education system needed to address the whole person: mind, body, spirit, and family. Today, the nation's 36 tribal colleges are located throughout Indian Country: all seven tribes in Montana and all five in North Dakota have colleges. Tribal Colleges are also located in the Southwest, the Great Lakes, and the upper Northwest. We are expanding in all regions, including Wyoming, Alaska and Oklahoma, and through distance education programs, our colleges reach all of "Indian Country."

In only four short decades, Tribal Colleges have achieved tremendous results. For example, in Montana, before Salish Kootenai College was established in 1976, less than 30 members of the Salish and Kootenai tribes had earned a college degree. Between 1976 and 1994, SKC alone graduated more than 400 tribal members. Today, Salish Kootenai College offers several bachelor's degree programs, including Bachelor's degree programs in Computer Engineering, Elementary Education, and Nursing, among others.

Tribal Colleges are first and foremost academic institutions, but because of the number of challenges facing Indian Country – high unemployment, poorly developed economies, poor health status, and lack of stable community infrastructures, Tribal Colleges are called upon to do much more than provide higher education services. Tribal Colleges often run entrepreneurial and business development centers. Many TCUs are the primary GED and Adult Basic Education provider on their reservations, and all TCUs provide a variety of evening, weekend training and para-professional programs for tribal employees, BIA and IHS staff, K-12 schools, tribal courts and justice system staff, and many others. TCUs run day care centers, health promotion and nutrition programs, community gardens, and often, the community library and tribal museum or archives. Tribal Colleges have strong partnerships and linkages with the local K-12 education system, offering Saturday and summer "bridge" programs for high school students, running summer camps for youth, and providing after-hours gymnasiums and computer labs for young people.

In terms of agriculture and land-based programs, Tribal Colleges are working diligently to protect our environments and sustain our lands and waters. My college, the College of Menominee Nation, has developed the "Sustainable Development Institute," founded on the principles of sustainability and Menominee values. Prompted by Menominee's long tradition of sustainable forestry practices, tribal leaders created the Sustainable Development Institute to encourage and build upon Menominee approaches to sustainable development.

Perhaps most important, like the College of Menominee Nation, all Tribal Colleges are actively and aggressively working to preserve and sustain their own tribal languages and cultures. All TCUs offer Native language courses, and in fact, passing a language course is a condition of graduation from a TCU. In some cases, the tribal language would have been completely lost if not for the Tribal College. Turtle Mountain Community College in Belcourt, North Dakota, was established primarily for this purpose, and over the years, its success in writing and revitalizing the Turtle Mountain Chippewa language has been tremendous. Fort Belknap College in Montana runs a K-6 language immersion school, right on campus. At the White Clay Immersion School, children learn the White Clay language and culture in addition to subjects they would normally study at any other school.

Many TCUs offer unique associate and bachelor degree programs, as well as in-service training, in elementary education. At the TCUs, teacher education programs follow cultural protocols and stress the use of Native language in everyday instruction. Well over 90 percent of teachers who graduate from a TCU teacher education program receive jobs on the reservation shortly after graduation, providing positive role models to Indian children.

Finally, Tribal Colleges are accountable institutions, always striving to be more accountable to our funders, our students, and our communities. Several years ago, AIHEC launched an ambitious and landmark effort called "AIHEC AIMS," which is a comprehensive data collection system for TCUs, created by Tribal College faculty and presidents, community members, funders, students, and accrediting agencies, aimed at improving our ability to measure and report our successes and challenges to our key stakeholders. Today, each Tribal College reports annually on a comprehensive set of 116 qualitative and quantitative indicators that allows us, for the first time, to share the true story of our success with funders, and most important, with our communities.

Tribal Colleges have made tremendous strides since we first began four decades ago, but many challenges remain. Tribal Colleges are poor institutions. In fact, Tribal Colleges are the most poorly funded institutions of higher education in the country:

- (1) First: Tribal Colleges are not state institutions, and consequently, we receive little or no state funding. In fact, very few states provide support for the non-Indian students attending TCUs, which account for about 20 percent of all tribal college students. However, if these students attended a state institution, the state would be required to provide the institution with operational support for them. This is something we are trying to rectify through education and public policy change at the state and local level.
- (2) Second: the tribal governments that have chartered Tribal Colleges are not the small handful of wealthy gaming tribes located near major urban areas. Rather, they are some of the poorest governments in the nation. In fact, three of the ten poorest counties in America are home to Tribal Colleges.
- (3) Finally, the federal government, despite its trust responsibility and treaty obligations, has never fully-funded our primary institutional operations source, the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Act. Today, the Act is appropriated at about \$5,490 per full time Indian Student, which is less than half the level that most states fund their institutions.

To continue to thrive and expand as community-based educational institutions, Tribal Colleges must stabilize, sustain, and increase our basic operational funding. Through tools such as AIHEC AIMS, we hope to better educate the public, lawmakers, and federal officials about the cost-effective success of our institutions. Through opportunities such as this, we hope to share with the Congress and others how we are helping to meet the challenges facing our tribal nations.

S. 633, THE TRIBAL HEALTH PROMOTION AND TCU ADVANCEMENT ACT

Mr. Chairman, S. 633, the Tribal Health Promotion and TCU Advancement Act, is a critical component of our strategic efforts to help address the needs of our tribal communities and build stronger and more prosperous tribal nations. By maximizing TCU participation in a set of key programs within the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Labor, this legislation will strengthen and sustain TCU capacity to help Native communities achieve healthier, longer, and more prosperous lives; more stable and secure families; and greater economic competitiveness.

This legislation is modeled after our successful 1994 land grant legislation, which established a partnership between Tribal Colleges and the U.S. Department of Agriculture that benefits all of Indian Country. Like the Educational Equity in Land Grant Status Act, this legislation includes authorizations for: (1) community-based outreach programs; (2) education and workforce development programs; and (3) an endowment, to be held by the U.S. Treasury, with the interest being used by TCUs for activities consistent with the goals of the legislation.

Key provisions of the legislation include:

TITLE I: HEALTH PROMOTION & HEALTH WORKFORCE TRAINING (DEPT. OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES)

1. Community-based Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Partnerships with Tribes

This section of the Act focuses on strategies to address the immediate and long-term health and wellness challenges that are threatening the very survival of Native people.

Health Fair-Outreach Formula Grants.

The bill proposes very modest (\$15,000 per TCU annually) formula grants to help us conduct annual, community-based, and culturally relevant health and wellness fairs at TCUs, building on existing but unfunded outreach programs at our institutions. This funding will help us bring more elders in for health screening and referrals, conduct diabetes screening for our Indian youth, who are contracting this deadly disease at rates far higher than any other group in the United States, and it will help us raise awareness about the warning signs of diseases that are literally killing our people – from children to Elders – every single day: alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence, and depression and other behavior health issues.

Competitive Capacity Building Grant Program.

The bill proposes a competitive grant program to help tribes and Tribal Colleges and Universities build the capacity to develop and implement long-term and community-based strategies in health promotion and disease prevention. Through five-year collaborations with tribal governments, Tribal Colleges could address targeted health promotion and disease prevention areas, including:

- Education Programs in Diabetes Prevention and Care, Obesity, and Nutrition;
- Injury Prevention;

- HIV-AIDS Prevention;
- Substance Abuse, including methamphetamine abuse; and
- Depression and other behavior health issues.

This program is critically needed and long overdue. Each day that ends before this legislation is enacted represents the loss of more of our precious young people. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the Fiscal Year 2010 budget recommendations from this Committee prioritize funding for the Indian Health Service and include increased funding to address substance abuse and other challenges facing our communities. We greatly appreciate those efforts, but it is not enough. It will never be enough until Tribal Colleges and Universities – the very institutions that serve as nurturing and safe families for our youth – are included as strategic partners in these efforts. Today, unfortunately, we are not partners.

This fact was illustrated last week by one of the Tribal College presidents. He said: “We applied for funding three times from SAMHSA. We thought we had a very competitive proposal, but we were never funded. They kept encouraging us to re-submit the proposal next year; and meanwhile, our people are still killing themselves.”

Another Tribal College president recently cited an alarming – but all too common – statistic from his institution: a recent survey revealed that 75 percent of all students had suicidal thoughts in the past year. “With statistics like that,” he said, “we can’t just have one prevention counselor on campus. Everyone on campus, whether he is an instructor, a counselor, a janitor, or a student, needs to know how to intervene. It’s an epidemic.”

Funding sources to address these issues are practically non-existent for our institutions, and the Indian Health Service, even if its leaders want to help us, focuses more on tertiary, rather than preventive, care. Tribal Colleges can help pick up the slack: we know how to teach, we know how to conduct community based activities, and we know how to reach young people, older people, and families. We have them -- young, old, families, individuals, friends, and relatives – on our campuses every day. We simply lack the funding needed to establish and sustain programs that will address individual needs and ultimately, turn our communities around.

Through the competitive grant program established under this legislation, we will have access to some of the resources we need.

2. American Indian Health Professions and Research Programs: Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH)

Health Professions Training Programs and Endowment: HRSA.

In addition to providing community-based health promotion and disease prevention outreach, Tribal Colleges and Universities are the ideal places to prepare the future American Indian health care workforce. I can make that statement confidently because I know first-hand that we are doing it now at the few Tribal Colleges that have been able to establish nursing, social work, and allied health programs. At the College of Menominee Nation, we have established a nursing career ladder program, beginning with Personal Care Workshops, and then progressing to the Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) program, the Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program, and then to the Registered Nursing (RN) program.

Oglala Lakota College on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota provides another example: Twenty years ago, only 10 percent of the workforce at the local Indian Health Service hospital was American Indian. Today, 80 percent or more of the nursing staff at the local IHS hospitals and clinics were educated and trained at Oglala Lakota College. Likewise, Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque trains virtually *all* of the optical technicians trained in the State of New Mexico. Salish Kootenai College on the Flathead Indian Reservation is the regional testing site for radiology technicians, not just for the American Indians entering this profession, but for *all* radiology technicians in that region of Montana.

I believe that Tribal Colleges are making a bigger impact in training the American Indian health care work force than any other institutions of higher education, but a tremendous need exists for more registered nurses, Community Health Representatives, and other allied health professionals. Every year, more tribal governments are approaching their Tribal College, asking the college to establish some type of allied health professions program. College of Menominee Nation, for example, established our LPN/RN programs just two years ago, and already, we are receiving requests from other tribes in Wisconsin to expand the program. Fort Belknap College in Montana was asked by its tribal government to establish a Certified Nursing Assistant program a few years ago, and already it has trained 50 CNAs, 90 percent of whom have become certified and are working today.

To help Tribal Colleges develop and expand programs such as these, S. 633 authorizes a competitive grant program specifically for TCUs and establishes a Federal Treasury Endowment Account to help TCUs sustain and equip such degree programs. An endowment program is essential to these types of programs due to the high cost of nursing and other health professions programs. Programs like these, targeted specifically to Tribal Colleges are necessary because few programs currently exist that are accessible to TCUs. In fact, many of the programs administered by the Department of Health and Human Services effectively prohibit TCU participation due to strict requirements regarding the qualifications of the Principal Investigator (such as mandating that he or she hold a Ph.D.) or other prohibitive practices. Similar to programs that the Congress has funded at the National Science Foundation and Department of Education, a program specifically established for Tribal Colleges and Universities would help ensure that the Indian Health Service and tribal health programs have trained health professions to help them meet the many health-related challenges facing our people.

Public Health Research and Capacity Building Program: NIH

To help ensure that tribes, Tribal Colleges, and our health educators can effectively meet the unique needs of Indian people living in rural or remote areas with depressed economies, inferior infrastructures, and limited access to services, our Tribal Colleges must have the resources needed to conduct applied research in our communities, particularly research involving epidemiology. Likewise, to better address the evolving needs and challenges facing our youth, research and information sharing on effective outreach and prevention strategies is essential. However, faculties at Tribal Colleges currently have limited access to federal research funding, for reasons similar to those outlined above. Specifically, because many TCU faculty members do not have Ph.D.s and must spend more time in the classroom than faculty at mainstream universities and research institutions, Tribal College research proposals are not scored competitively by federal agencies and their review panels. A research program specifically targeted to faculty at Tribal Colleges and Universities, particularly one that allows for research experiences for TCU students, ultimately could significantly improve the health status of American Indians and others in rural America.

S. 633 would establish such a program for TCUs, similar to the USDA's 1994 land grant research program, which funds applied research projects at Tribal Colleges. Over the past several years, TCUs have used this program to conduct vitally needed research on issues particularly relevant to their communities and tribes. Salish Kootenai College in Montana and Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College in Wisconsin are conducting vitally needed research – research that no one else is doing -- on invasive plants that threaten tribal lakes and lands. Fort Belknap College in Montana is assessing the impacts of mining activities on soil microbes at a cyanide-leach mine site, and it, like many other TCUs, is involved in reservation-based water quality testing and research.

All of these research activities involve students and are helping to build a future science workforce throughout Indian Country.

TITLE II: ADVANCING TRIBES THROUGH TCUS (DEPARTMENT OF LABOR)

Economic Development to Address Generational Unemployment and Economic Development Capacity Building

In addition to its focus on health promotion/disease prevention and health workforce development, S. 633 also contains important provisions aimed at strengthening partnerships between tribal governments and Tribal Colleges that will help develop and expand reservation-based economies and communities. Specifically, the bill would establish a competitive grant program to fund TCU-tribal partnerships that encourage micro-enterprise development, entrepreneurship, business degree programs, municipality planning, and leadership development.

With very little and extremely competitive resources, Tribal Colleges are working to strengthen tribal governments and build thriving economies and communities. Sitting Bull College in Fort Yates, North Dakota, offers small business incubators to the community, with training in business plan development and marketing. Chief Dull Knife College in Lake Deer, Montana, recently helped create a community development corporation and provides workshops in e-commerce, financial literacy, and youth entrepreneurship. These are just two examples of efforts currently underway that could be replicated at other Tribal Colleges if resources were available.

In addition to implementing strategies to encourage entrepreneurship, Tribal Colleges also serve as key infrastructure providers on their reservations. For example, Salish Kootenai College has served as a local ISP (Internet Service Provider) in its area, bringing broadband Internet access into peoples' homes. Sitting Bull College runs a nationally recognized reservation-wide bus service, taking thousands of residents to doctors' appointments, classes, and community functions. Some TCUs run building trades programs that partner with the tribe to build vitally needed housing for their communities, and a number of TCUs have student dorms, often including married-student and family housing.

Tribal Colleges are economic drivers on their reservations and in their communities. For example: A study conducted by United Tribes Technical College in North Dakota revealed that UTTC contributes \$46.7 million in direct and secondary benefits to State's economy in one year. Oglala Lakota College employs 300 people, runs the tribal day care and Head Start programs, and as I mentioned above, trains 80 percent of the local Nursing force. Tribal Colleges throughout the nation are educating and

training K-12 teachers, tribal leaders, and Native scientists.

The keys to our success lie in our ability to create strong partnerships, to tell our story of success effectively, and to stay focused on our collective vision of building stronger Tribal Nations through Tribal Higher Education.

We look forward to working with Senator Tester and the co-sponsors of S.633 to achieve this vision, and thank them for their commitment to and trust in Tribal Colleges and Universities.

EXPANSION OF S. 633, TO ACHIEVE THE ORIGINAL GOALS OF COMPREHENSIVE LEGISLATION

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I respectfully request that Senator Tester and the members of this Committee work with us to better achieve the original intent of the legislation: the creation of a comprehensive strategy through which Tribal Colleges are full partners with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, working together to help build, strengthen, and sustain thriving tribal communities.

As truly engaged institutions, Tribal Colleges are the catalysts for change in Indian Country. Although our institutions are the most poorly funded institutions of higher education in the U.S., I have tried to demonstrate today how TCUs are addressing many of the economic and social challenges facing Native communities. We are:

- Preparing an American Indian health workforce;
- Improving the health and wellness of students and their families;
- Combating substance abuse, including alcohol and methamphetamine use;
- Vitalizing Native cultures and languages; and
- Creating economic development opportunities in the Nation's poorest communities.

In its original form, this legislation addressed *all* of these areas, strengthening and sustaining TCU capacity to help our underserved Native communities achieve healthier, longer, and more prosperous lives; more stable and secure families; and greater economic competitiveness through access to vitally needed new and existing programs, resources, and partnerships within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

However, for various reasons during the 110th Congress, the legislation was changed before being reported by the Committee to the full Senate and some provisions were deleted that are critical to the legislation's goal and to the future of Native America.

Native Language Research and Programs.

As originally introduced by Senator Tester in the 110th Congress, this legislation included a modest provision authorizing \$12 million in funding for Native language vitalization and training at Tribal Colleges. However, this provision was removed, and AIHEC began pursuing an alternative strategy in this area.

Due to the extreme lack of funding available in this area and the urgent need for action, we respectfully request that the Committee thoughtfully revisit this issue. As you know, the "Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act" currently provides only \$3.5 million per year, to be awarded competitively among potentially hundreds of American Indian and Alaska Native language projects. Quite simply, we must set our goals higher, both in terms of funding and activities: we need to

significantly increase resources, and we must move beyond "preservation" to the vitalization of our Native languages. These are the goals of Tribal Colleges and Universities.

Mr. Chairman, nothing is more central to the core function of Tribal Colleges and Universities than the restoration and vitalization of tribal languages and cultures. In fact, it is the mission of every Tribal College in this country because we realize that without our language, our very identity will be lost.

Language restoration and vitalization is our mission and our life's work. It is not, however, the mission of state public schools, which educate 90 percent of all American Indian children; nor is it in the mission of North Dakota State University, the University of Montana, or any other state university. More so than any other group of institutions, Tribal Colleges are actively and aggressively working to preserve, sustain, and vitalize our own tribal languages and cultures, as I mentioned earlier. In some cases, the tribal language would have been completely lost if not for the Tribal College. Turtle Mountain Community College in Belcourt, North Dakota, was established primarily for this purpose, and over the years, its success in writing and revitalizing the Turtle Mountain Chippewa language has been tremendous.

All TCUs offer Native language courses, and passing a language course is a condition of graduation from a TCU; and Tribal Colleges are responsible for the vast majority of the 50 or so Native language immersion programs in the U.S. Fort Belknap College in Montana runs a K-6 language immersion school, right on campus. At the White Clay Immersion School, children learn the White Clay language and culture in addition to subjects they would normally study in public school.

Mr. Chairman, of the 155 Indigenous languages still being spoken in the United States, 135 or more are spoken only by elders. We do not believe that a modest \$12 million program will threaten any other program – the need is so great, and the current resources are so pitifully small. We simply must work together to do more. We urge you to include authorization for a TCU Native language program, similar to the provisions of Senator Tester's original legislation. Such a program could be located within the Department of Health and Human Services, as originally proposed, or perhaps within the Department of Education or the Interior.

TCU Health and Wellness Centers.

Likewise, we urge the Committee to consider including Senator Tester's original provisions regarding health and wellness centers at Tribal Colleges. These provisions were deleted because some individuals stated that authorization for funding of health and wellness centers at Tribal Colleges would: (1) potentially take funding away from vitally needed funding for Indian Health Service hospitals and clinics and tribal health facilities; and (2) that health and wellness centers at TCUs would compete with tribal health care delivery services.

Mr. Chairman, we believe that over the past few months, the situation regarding IHS and tribal health facilities construction has changed so dramatically as to remove any fear anyone could have over a *modest authorization* for a TCU health and wellness facilities program. Specifically, both the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and this Committee's Fiscal Year 2010 priorities should put that fear to rest. Further, we believe that attempts to prohibit Tribal Colleges from establishing health and wellness centers, particularly when the establishment of such facilities is at the request of and in partnership with their respective tribal governments, restricts the exercise of tribal sovereignty and should not be tolerated. Already, several Tribal Colleges, at the request of their tribal governments and governing

boards, have established health and wellness centers or student health clinics. Other requests are currently pending. For example, the Salish and Kootenai tribes have asked Salish Kootenai College to establish a student health clinic.

Community-based Social Science Research.

We urge the Committee to ensure that the bill exemplifies Senator Tester's original intent regarding joint Tribal College-Tribal Government Economic and Community Development Research, including provisions authorizing funding for workforce inventories and industrial analysis, community development through coordinated planning, and multi-stakeholder partnership models. As outlined above, Tribal Colleges are economic drivers on our reservations and we should be working closely with our tribal governments to strengthen our tribal economies and communities. Dedicated funding for social science research at Tribal Colleges, in consultation with tribal governments is essential for good and data driven decision making. We ask that social science research provisions be included in the legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to share our story, our successes, and our needs with you today. We look forward to working with you to achieve enactment of S.633, the Tribal Health Promotion and Tribal Colleges and Universities Advancement Act of 2009.