



STATEMENT OF DR. BILLIE JO KIPP
PRESIDENT, BLACKFEET COMMUNITY COLLEGE – BROWNING, MONTANA
PREPARED FOR THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
OVERSIGHT HEARING: EXAMINING HIGHER EDUCATION FOR AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS

JUNE 11, 2014

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, my name is Billie Jo Kipp. I am a member of the Blackfeet tribe, President of Blackfeet Community College in Browning, Montana, and a member of the Board of Directors of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). On behalf of my institution, Blackfeet Community College, and the 36 other Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) in the U.S. that compose AIHEC, thank you for inviting me to testify at this hearing examining higher education for American Indian students.

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, Chairman Tester, for your tremendous work on behalf of the seven tribal communities in Montana and all Native people.

My statement touches on three topics: The Tribal College Movement in general; the accomplishments and challenges of TCUs in bring high-quality, culturally appropriate higher education opportunities to our students and outreach programs to our communities; and some recommendations that will help us address our collective mission of improving the lives of our students through higher education and moving American Indians toward self-sufficiency. I submit this written statement for the Hearing Record.

BACKGROUND: THE TRIBAL COLLEGE MOVEMENT

Mr. Chairman, you and many of the members of this Committee know the Tribal Colleges well. Perhaps no other Members of Congress know better our challenges: as some of the most poorly funded institutions of higher education in the country, our struggle is a daily one. Yet, you also know of our considerable successes, from our work to build self-esteem and change the life and future of our students through nurturing educational environments that are culturally based and uniquely relevant to our students, to our efforts to build stronger and more prosperous Tribal nations through the restoration of our languages, community outreach programs and 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.

Tribal Colleges and Universities are a vital and essential component of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) education. 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. We serve students from well over 250 federally recognized tribes, 80 percent of whom receive federal financial aid. In total, TCUs annually serve about 88,000 AIs/ANs through a wide variety of academic and community-based programs. In Montana, 50 percent of all American Indians enrolled in

higher education attend one of seven TCUs in our state, and a full 13 percent are students of Blackfeet Community College. In fact, according to all available statistics on American Indians enrolled in federally recognized Indian tribes and currently engaged in higher education nationally, more than 50 percent attend TCUs.¹

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. Currently, all TCUs offer associate degrees; 13 TCUs offer multiple bachelor's degrees, and five TCUs offer master's degrees. Each TCU is committed to improving the lives of its students through higher education and to moving American Indians toward self-sufficiency.

Tribal colleges are public institutions of higher education and, as such, student access and success are core goals. These present real challenges, because more than 70 percent of our students require developmental education in mathematics, and more than half need remedial work in reading and writing. Still, the overall TCU retention rate has improved 32 percent in eight years and our graduation rate is up 17 percent. TCUs have achieved this through first year experience programs, integrating academics with student support, and putting research in the classroom. Yet, while our retention and completion rates have improved, our operations funding has not.

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, our colleges are called upon to do much more than provide higher education services. TCUs often run entrepreneurial and business development centers; many TCUs are the primary GED/Hi SET or other HS equivalency program and Adult Basic Education provider on our reservations, and most if not 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 and Head Start programs, health nutrition education programs, community gardens, and often, the community library and tribal museum or archives.

Perhaps most important, Blackfeet Community College and all of the TCUs are actively and aggressively working to preserve and sustain their own tribal language and culture. All TCUs offer Native language courses. In some cases, the tribal language would have been completely lost if not for the local 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 remarkable. Aaniiih Nakoda 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 routinely 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

¹This statistic excludes self-reporting, which despite having been shown in studies to be unreliable, is the measure used by the Department of Education's White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education.

emphasize the use of Native language in everyday instruction.

Tribal Colleges have advanced American Indian higher education significantly since we first began in the late 1960s/early 1970s. Yet despite these advances funding for TCUs remains grossly inadequate:

- (1) 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 state residents attending TCUs, which account for about 20 percent of all Tribal College students. However, if these same 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) The tribal governments that chartered Tribal Colleges are not among the handful of enormously wealthy gaming tribes located near major urban areas that one reads about in the mass media. Rather, they are some of the poorest governments in the nation.
- (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 Assistance Act. Today, the Act is appropriated at about \$5,850 per full time Indian Student, which after over 30 years is still only about 73 percent of the level authorized by Congress to operate these institutions.

Faced with ever rising costs of day-to-day operations, to continue to thrive and expand as community-based educational institutions, TCUs must stabilize, sustain, and increase our basic operational funding. Through tools such as AIHEC's comprehensive data collection initiative, AIHEC AIMS, which includes more than 120 quantitative and qualitative indicators on which all TCUs report annually, 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.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Since our inception, Blackfeet Community College – like all TCUs – has taken hope and a pitifully few dollars, and shaped them into opportunity: opportunity for success throughout the education continuum, early childhood to college; healthier lifestyles; more prosperous communities; revitalized languages; and safer environments for all of our people. We make all of this possible as holistic tribal institutions of higher education, but over the past several years, changes in federal policy and funding priorities have made our work even more difficult.

The Education Continuum:

Head Start: With the reauthorization of the Head Start program in the mid-1990s, Congress imposed new performance and professional competency requirements. Specifically, at least 50 percent of Head Start teachers nation-wide were to have a baccalaureate or advanced degree in early childhood education or a baccalaureate or advanced degree in any subject and coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education with experience teaching preschool-age children, and 50 percent of all teacher assistants were to have had an associate's degree or enrolled in an associate's program. While the department may be prepared to declare that this nationwide goal has been achieved, far less than half of Head Start teachers in the American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start Program area hold an associate's or bachelor's degree. Indian children deserve the best, and the TCUs are ideal

catalysts for preparing Indian Head Start teachers so that they might offer these children the Head Start programs they deserve. Until the mid-2000s, the TCU-Head Start program helped TCUs build capacity in early childhood education and provided scholarships and stipends for Indian Head Start teachers and teacher's aides to enroll in TCU early childhood programs. Unfortunately, the program was eliminated despite the great need to expand educational opportunities for Head Start teachers and aides.

Teacher Preparation: Of the 34 accredited TCUs, 29 offer early childhood and elementary education associate's degrees and 10 TCUs have their own elementary education bachelor's degree programs. In fact, education program students represent 10 percent of all declared majors at TCUs and in 2011-12; 10 percent of all certificates and degrees earned at TCUs were in education. Growth in the American Indian teacher workforce is critically important because we know that children learn best and are more likely to graduate high school and attend college when they have teachers with whom they can relate – teachers who look like them.

TCUs are committed to building a Native-speaking teacher workforce, and all TCU elementary education programs stress culturally and developmentally appropriate pedagogy and embed community values and tribal culture in the content. Their strategies are working. For example, half of all the Native special education teachers in Montana graduated from Salish Kootenai College. At Blackfeet Community College students who decide to major in Blackfeet language or Blackfeet studies are strongly encouraged to apply for the Class 7 Teaching License through Montana's Office of Public Instruction office. Today, BCC and SKC could easily enroll 40-50 American Indian teacher aides in elementary education bachelor's degree programs if we had funding to provide scholarships and expand our capacity. But the key federal funding source for tribal teacher development, operated by the Department of Education's Office of Indian Education, has been on a downward funding trend almost since it was re-established in 2000.

BCC has not received a grant through the program for several years. Still, we continue to encourage success, including developing a behavioral health training program for K-12 teacher's aides on our reservation, so they can recognize and help address fundamental challenges facing our little ones. We need your help, Mr. Chairman, to reinforce the TCUs' role in American Indian teacher preparation and increase the number of TCUs able to participate in the grant program designed to build an American Indian Teacher / Administrator Corps.

Dual Credit: American Indian youth have the highest high school drop-out rates in the nation. Research tells us that keeping students engaged and setting achievable goals and realistic expectations are keys to completion. For this reason, nearly all of the TCUs are currently engage in dual credit programs that are designed to keep American Indian high school students engaged in school, to graduate, and to pursue higher education goals. All of these programs are offered at little or no cost for the students and high schools. The TCUs – without any compensation from states or the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) – offer this service at our expense because we know it is one very effective way to help save our American Indian children. It gives them a path to a better future and opens a world of opportunity.

TCUs will continue to offer these life-changing and life-saving programs, but over the past few years, we have been urging the BIE and various states to work with us to expand these programs and level the playing field.

Improve Native Workforce Opportunity: Re-establish the TCU Adult Basic Ed/GED Training Program: In the mid-1990s Congress eliminated a modest set-aside within the Adult Basic Education block grant program that funded vitally needed TCU GED and ABE training programs. Now, all federal funding goes to the states, which rarely – and minimally – fund tribal GED programs. Despite the absence of dedicated funding, TCUs must find a way, often using already insufficient institutional operating funds, to continue to provide adult basic education classes for those American Indians that the present K-12 Indian education system has failed. Before many individuals can even begin the course work needed to learn a productive skill, they first must earn a GED. The new GED exam, which was instituted in January 2014, has a much stronger focus on mathematics. As noted earlier, placement tests for TCU-entering students reveal a tremendous need for math remediation. Additionally, the new GED test is fully computerized. While younger GED seekers may be comfortable with computer-based testing, older citizens may not be. These factors indicate a continuing and growing need for adult basic educational programs and GED preparation on Indian reservations. TCUs must have sufficient and stable funding to continue to provide these essential services and to ensure their communities’ residents have the same chances to succeed as others throughout the country. American Indians have the highest high school drop-out rates, highest unemployment, and highest poverty rates in the nation. With the launch of the new GED, the need for this modest program (ED-OVAE) is even more critical. The fix is simple, no-cost, and life-changing.

Egregious Funding Inequities: Despite a proven return on investment, trust responsibility, and binding treaty obligations, Tribal Colleges have never been adequately funded by the federal government. The Tribally Controlled Colleges & Universities Assistance Act of 1978 authorizes \$8,000/Indian Student (ISC) for TCUs’ operating budgets, but TCUs currently are receiving only \$5,850/Indian student. The president requests and Congress appropriates over \$200 million annually to operate Howard University (HU), *the only other Minority Serving Institution that receives federal operating funds*. HU’s federal operating funding is almost \$22,000/student. HU needs this funding - so do TCUs.

Congress designated TCUs as land-grant institutions in 1994. Our USDA partnership is important because as American Indians, land is central to who we are. We are people of a place. Yet, the TCU (1994) land-grant programs are absurdly small compared to other land-grants, even though some of the reservations served by 1994 institutions are larger than several states. Here are the numbers for FY2014:

Program	TCUS (1994s) - 34	States (1862s)	HBCUs (1890s) - 17
Extension (<i>community outreach</i>)	\$4.4 million -- competitive	\$300 million – formula	\$43.9 million
AG/land Research (<i>basic, applied</i>)	\$1.8 million	\$243.7 million	\$52.5 million (\$1M minimum)
FERTEP, CYFAR, McIntire-Stennis	NO	YES	YES

In addition to the basic funding inequity, the 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions are eligible to compete for millions of dollars in funding from seven additional programs known as Smith-Lever 3(d) programs, including a Federal Recognized Tribes Extension Program and a Children, Youth and Families at Risk initiative, in which the 1994 Tribal College land-grants are barred from participation. Consistent with the philosophy of exclusion, the 1994 institutions also are barred from participating in

the McIntire-Stennis Forestry program. This is particularly problematic in Montana, because Salish Kootenai College – which has the only 4-year forestry degree program among the TCUs – is shut out of this vital program despite the tremendous need for applied research on tribal forests. Some people do not like to hear about these disparities. Yet, these are the facts.

The negative funding impact for Tribal colleges and our students is compounded in that we are already being disproportionately impacted by ongoing efforts to reduce the federal budget deficit and control federal spending. The FY 2011 Continuing Resolution eliminated all of the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) community-based programs, including a critically needed TCU-HUD facilities program. Through this modest but vital program, TCUs were able to maximize leveraging potential, often 10-to-1, securing far greater non-HUD funding to construct and equip Head Start and early childhood centers; student and community computer laboratories and public libraries; and student and faculty housing in rural and remote communities where few and sometimes none of these facilities existed.

Important STEM programs, administered by the National Science Foundation and NASA were also cut, and for the first time since the NSF program was established in FY 2001, no new TCU-STEM awards were made in FY 2011. While NSF-TCUP grants resumed in FY 2012, a year of grant opportunity was lost. Additionally, TCUs and their students suffer the realities of cuts to programs such as GEAR-UP, TRIO, SEOG, and are seriously impacted by the new highly restrictive Pell Grant eligibility criteria more profoundly than mainstream institutions of higher education, which can realize economies of scale due to large endowments, alternative funding sources, including the ability to charge higher tuition rates and enroll more financially stable students, and access to affluent alumni. The loss of opportunities that cuts to DoEd, HUD, NSF, and NASA programs represent to TCUs, is magnified by cuts to workforce development programs within the Department of Labor, nursing and allied health professions tuition forgiveness and scholarship programs operated by the Department of Health and Human Services, and an important TCU-based nutrition education program planned by USDA. Combined, these cuts strike at the most economically disadvantaged and health-challenged Americans.

Mr. Chairman, the issues I have outlined demonstrate that the educational challenges we face are systemic. Studies, pilot projects, short-lived funding strategies have led us to some viable, cost-effective, and proven solutions. What will it take to move forward? It will take two things: First, a *commitment* to act – a commitment to move beyond talk and toward a common vision for *Strong Tribal Nations through Excellence in Tribal Higher Education*. Second, it will take resources, albeit modest, to make an investment in proven strategies for success. What will Congress and the nation get for the modest investments outlined below? I can guarantee a rate of return on your investment of at least 14.3 percent. According to an independent analysis by the American Association of Community Colleges, the nation's community colleges – which includes all tribal colleges – yield a return of \$5.80 for every dollar spent (or a 14.3 percent rate of return), for academic programs alone. For TCUs, this accounts for about one-third of all of our students, so an investment in TCUs should yield an even higher return.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation One: Revive the TCU-Head Start Partnership program by directing the Head Start Bureau to designate a minimum of \$7 million of the \$8.86 billion recommended for Head Start Programs in the FY 2015 Budget, to the TCU-Head Start Partnership program, to revive this vital partnership and ensure that this program can continue and expand so that all TCUs have the

opportunity to participate in the TCU- Head Start partnership program and help in achieving the goals of Head Start for children in Indian Country.

Recommendation Two: Specifically and clearly reinforce the lead role of TCUs in American Indian Teacher Preparation by increasing the required partnerships with a TCU in applying for American Indian Teacher / Administrator Corps professional development grants designed to increase the number of American Indian teachers and administrators serving their reservation communities and provide a minimum of \$10,000,000 to fund these critically needed competitive awarded grants.

Recommendation Three: Re-establish a TCU Adult Basic Education competitive grants program. TCUs recommend that a minimum of \$8,000,000 of the funds appropriated annually for the Adult Education and Family Literacy grants be made available to make competitive awards to TCUs to help meet the growing demand for adult basic education and remediation program services on their respective reservations.

Recommendation Four: Congress should direct the Bureau of Indian Education to develop and fund a mechanism to reimburse and expand dual credit programs for BIE high school students attending TCUs; and to the extent possible, Congress should encourage states to reimburse TCUs for dual credit courses, just as they do every other public institution of higher education in their state.

Recommendation Five: *Adopt a 5-Year Plan to Address Long-term TCU Inequalities in Federal Programs.* We need a commitment to establishing a process, beginning in the FY2015 Budget/Appropriations cycle, that: (1) identifies current funding inequities faced by TCUs in federal programs; and (2) works steadily to rectify them. As a first step, we urge the Committee to specifically question the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture on these inequities and their efforts to address them.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, we recognize and greatly appreciate you as a strong proponent of the Tribal Colleges and Universities. And now more than ever, we need your help. The time for studies, commissions, and talk is past. We all know the problems. TCUs have solutions. We have created tribal institutions that are sound and stable; that have a high return on investment; and that have the power to transform Indian Country. We ask that you and the members of this committee work with us to find viable ways of achieving our fair funding goals so that we may continue to bring access and excellence to our students and the communities we serve.