

**Testimony of
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U.S. Department of the Interior
Before the
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On
Tribal Colleges and Universities**

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chairman, and Members of the Committee. My name is Carl Artman and I am the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior. I am pleased to be here today to speak about post-secondary Indian education. This is a topic of great interest to me. From 2002 to 2006, I served on the President's Board of Advisors on Tribal Colleges and Universities.

BACKGROUND

The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), formerly the Office of Indian Education Programs within the Bureau of Indian Affairs, is committed to improving the overall quality of our education system. The BIE is a unique system which includes 184 elementary and secondary schools located across 23 states – 66 of these schools include residential components (dormitories) and two post-secondary colleges: Haskell Indian Nations University and the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute. The BIE also administers grants to 25 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). In addition, the Department of Education provides funds to improve and strengthen the academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability of eligible TCUs.

Each year our system serves approximately 46,000 Indian students in grades K – 12. We are striving to support a seamless education program from early childhood through adulthood by providing safe, secure, and healthy learning environments that promote academic achievement and successful student transition to post-secondary education.

We must improve our overall high school graduation rate and we also need to better prepare our students academically so they have the option of continuing their education at the post-secondary level. In meeting the workforce needs of the 21st century, nearly 90% of the fastest growing jobs in this country require post-secondary education. TCUs provide for many of our students the next step in that educational development. However, before students can move on to college course work, they must acquire foundational knowledge in math, science, and language skills. We want to work more collaboratively with our TCU partners to identify better ways to better prepare our students for college course work. This could include “student enhancing” efforts of

bridging programs and individualized tutoring services.

This summer in Denver, Colorado (July 24-26, 2007), the BIE will hold its first national partnership conference to promote collaboration and cooperation with the various stakeholders of the BIE education system. The goal of the conference is to better use available stakeholder resources to support student achievement. The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), representing the TCUs, is a key conference partner focusing on student transition to post-secondary education.

OVERVIEW OF TCU PROGRAM FUNCTIONS

TCU Operations Funding

Our elementary and secondary education programs use 90 percent of the BIE's total budget. Appropriations for TCUs have increased approximately 45 percent in the past 15 years with the authorized appropriations for tribal colleges remaining relatively steady over the past three years. TCU student enrollments have increased and the number of tribal colleges funded under the Act has grown from only a few in the early 1980s to 25 as of FY 2007. Funding is limited to a one-school-per-tribe basis, using a formula that funds each TCU based on a full-time student equivalency.

The BIE's primary function in implementing the Act has been historically more administrative than service-oriented. These functions include collecting and reviewing applications for eligibility to receive TCU operating grants, ensuring that funds reach the tribal colleges, and ensuring tribal colleges receive necessary technical assistance required to fulfill their commitment under the Act. The BIE carries out its responsibility to the TCUs by administering the appropriated funds intended to defray expenditures for academic, educational and administrative purposes, and for the operation and maintenance of the tribal colleges.

Currently, the Act is funded at \$54 million for operating grants. In 2007 the BIE is administering operating grants to 25 Tribal Colleges and Universities. In 2006, these schools offered over 350 degree programs and 180 vocational programs. During 2006, the TCUs served 27,897 Indian students and conferred 1,298 degrees and certificates.

Endowment Program

Included in the Act is a provision for endowments to TCUs. Each year, based on availability, TCUs may receive endowments from the BIE, which are in turn matched by the TCU at the rate of one-half of the government's contribution, and placed in restricted interest-bearing accounts. Interest income received by the colleges is available to the college to supplement and further defray the expense of running the college. The BIE has funded close to \$8 million in endowments to TCUs since 1999.

Technical Assistance

Technical Assistance (TA) is another provision of the Act. By election and resolution of the tribal colleges, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) currently receives the TA funds in the amount of \$600,000 to provide various technical assistance services to TCUs. Since 1999, just under \$2 million has been provided for TA to TCUs.

In an effort to monitor and promote the success of the TA program, the BIE maintains ongoing collaboration with the AIHEC and the White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities (WHITCU). This effort helps to ensure that TCUs receive adequate support to carry out their mission. As a part of its annual plan, AIHEC provides the BIE with a progress report each year as well as a description of the continuing efforts made on behalf of the TCUs.

Collaboration requires ongoing interaction to be productive and successful. The BIE participates in meetings with the WHITCU Advisory Board members, the Tribal Colleges and Universities Annual Presidents' Planning Session sponsored by AIHEC, and the National 2007 Summer Conference. AIHEC is one of the partners for this conference.

Honors Program

Most recently, we have sought out the help of the tribal colleges to implement the Honors Program – a program designed to hire top Indian students into Indian Affairs. The Honors Program is designed to provide opportunities at three educational levels - High School, Junior/Community College, and College/University. Graduates can be appointed directly into available Indian Affairs positions. Our BIE and Human Resources Office are working with three tribal colleges to provide opportunities for students attending these colleges to earn class credits while developing marketing plans to advertise the program and its benefits to Indian students and Indian Affairs management.

BIE's Adult Education (Tribal)

Indian Affairs is implementing strategies to support our vision of “life-long learning” and to improve the literacy of American Indians residing on reservations. The BIE's Adult Education Program is funded at \$2,441,000, and allows tribes to direct their Tribal Priority Allocation funds to adult learning situations where adults are able to obtain a GED or gain the basic skills they need to transition into a community or tribal college and/or job placement. Oftentimes, students attending tribal colleges and universities require remedial education in basic math and reading skills. This program provides educational opportunities for individuals who lack the level of literacy skills necessary for a smooth transition into post-secondary education. Graduation rates for American Indians are currently lower than the national average; the program supports the advancement of students to higher levels of education. Participation in adult basic education, community education, and developmental courses leads to upgraded skills and abilities to match job placements with community members, thus creating opportunities for developing stronger local economies in Indian communities.

Tribal College Teacher's Aide Training

Indian Affairs has requested program enhancement funds of over \$5 million to support initiatives such as the Teacher's Aide Training program, consistent with the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which provides for the *Qualifications for Teachers and Paraprofessionals*. The BIE-funded TCUs play an important role in developing specialized certification programs for current, new, and potential teacher aides for Indian schools. Programs can develop the training through distance learning or classroom instruction, with local or regional concentration and emphasis, following the "grow your own" philosophy. Indian schools located in remote and isolated areas often rely on members who have a vested interest in their communities and wish to remain in jobs on the reservations.

Of the 25 TCUs, 15 provide at least an Associate's degree in elementary education, two are identified as having teacher's aide programs, and the remaining TCUs have classes in early childhood education and/or development.

Other Tribal College Projects - Partnering With Economic Development

Indian Affairs supports other initiatives such as our recent partnership with the Colorado School of Mines (CSM), the United Tribes Technical College (UTTC), and the Navajo Technical College (NTC) (formerly Crown Point Institute of Technology) to develop energy, educational, vocational, and technology curriculum for Indian colleges. Our Office of Indian Energy and Economic Development (IEED) provided a grant to CSM to develop a curriculum in partnership with UTTC and NTC. The CSM will provide faculty training and will team-teach some portions of the curriculum; they will also be retained as a future source of technical expertise for the colleges. Internship opportunities will be established with energy industries and we will create opportunities for high performing students to transfer into a full four-year degree program at the CSM. We are looking at additional opportunities to expand on this initiative.

CONCLUSION

With high unemployment rates in Indian Country, solidifying the tribal colleges' infrastructures is critical. Increased collaboration and partnerships between TCUs and federal, state, regional and local entities must be established in a manner that addresses specific needs. Education and workforce development will lead to local employment opportunities where tribal members can reinvest in a sustainable local economy. Education must provide not only a seamless process of continuing lifelong educational opportunities, but the necessary skill sets for our Indian communities to offer a vibrant labor pool which will lead to economic growth for all Indian people.

The challenges as well as benefits are shared by all. In order to promote change, vested parties must establish economic development plans that involve potential business and industry opportunities, tribal college administrators, community-planning officials, and

various federal, state, regional, local and tribal governments.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for inviting me to testify today on such an important issue for our Indian people. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.