

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
January 9, 2015**American Indian Higher Education Consortium****121 Oronoco Street, Alexandria VA 2314****Contact:** Carrie Billy**Phone:** 703.838.0400 X 110**E-Mail:** cbilly @aihec.org**AIHEC STATEMENT: “America’s Promise” and Tribal Colleges & Universities**

Last night, President Obama unveiled a new “America’s Promise” – a proposal to provide tuition-free community college education to millions of Americans. The American Indian Higher Education Consortium is pleased to report that the White House has confirmed that Tribal Colleges will be included in this initiative. The President effort exemplifies his commitment to strengthening opportunities for Native American youth.

We will have to wait until the release of the President’s budget for details on how the program will work, but AIHEC is committed to working with the Administration and the Congress throughout the process to ensure that the first Americans – American Indians and Alaska Natives – are included in this “America’s Promise.” This is a landmark idea that could transform higher education and workforce development in this country. It will open new worlds of opportunity for thousands of American Indian young people; and as Tribal Colleges, we applaud the President’s leadership.

Tribal Colleges are locally-based, tribally-driven institutions of higher education that award predominately 2-year associate degrees and certificates to American Indians and others throughout Indian Country. TCUs serve some of the poorest communities in this country (seven of the 10 poorest counties in the U.S. are home to a tribal college). More than 70 percent of our students are first generation college students and more than 70 percent receive Pell grants. These students will benefit tremendously from “America’s Promise.”

We are particularly pleased that this initiative will mean that more American Indians and Alaska Natives will be able to access – and most important, complete – a degree program in a field that will help our tribes grow their Native workforce. The initiative should also help address some of the huge unpaid tuition write-offs that TCUs incur every year. We have been trying to make a case for an increased focus on non-loan student financial support such as scholarships and tuition aid because of huge shortfall in American Indian student financial support and the detrimental impact this has on TCUs and tribal communities. Financial stress is the greatest deterrent to successful completion at our colleges, and the cost is high, both financially and in terms of completion and graduation rates. We are excited that the White House is taking an initial leadership role in helping to address student need.

That said, throughout the process, we need to stay vigilant and do everything we can to ensure that TCUs, Native students, and *Tribal* higher education are included in all proposals, both from the Administration and the Congress.

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