



**Press Release**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 8, 2015

**American Indian Higher Education Consortium**

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**AIHEC STATEMENT: “America’s College Promise” and Tribal Colleges & Universities**

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium, which is the nation’s 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities, strongly supports legislation introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate today to allow millions of students in America – including American Indian and Alaska Native students at TCUs -- the chance to share in the opportunity of higher education. We applaud Representative Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (D-VA) and Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) for their leadership in sponsoring the America’s College Promise Act of 2015, landmark legislation that could transform higher education and workforce development in this country.

The America’s College Promise Act will open new worlds of opportunity for thousands of American Indian young people at Tribal Colleges. Enactment of this legislation 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.

Tribal colleges are locally based, tribally driven institutions of higher education that award predominately two-year associate’s degrees and certificates to Native students 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 65 percent of our students are first generation college students and almost 75 percent receive Pell grants. These students, their tribal communities, and the nation as a whole, will benefit tremendously from the America’s College Promise Act.

The Act 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 a 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.

AIHEC looks forward to working with Representative Scott, Senator Baldwin, and their colleagues in the House and Senate toward enactment of this legislation and other important issues related to excellence, access, and success for all students in higher education.

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