

## TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AGENDA FOR PRESIDENT-ELECT DONALD J. TRUMP & HIS ADMINISTRATION

NOVEMBER 2016

**ABOUT TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES:** In a bold expression of sovereignty, American Indian tribal governments began chartering their own institutions of higher education – Tribal Colleges – in the last 1960s. Today, 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities operate more than 75 campus sites across 16 states, serving over 160,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives each year in place-based academic and community outreach programs. Nurtured by and in turn nurturing the land, languages, cultures, and the distinct peoples who created them, TCUs are among the most dynamic components of the American higher education system.

The first Tribal College, like all that followed, was established for two reasons: the near complete failure of the U.S. higher education system to address the needs of – or even include – American Indians; and the need to preserve our culture, our language, our lands, our sovereignty – our past and our future. The guiding vision of the Tribal College Movement is an education system founded on traditional knowledge and focused on a prosperous future through job creation and community expansion.

In some of the most rural and impoverished areas of our country, Tribal Colleges take hope, ideas and a pitifully few dollars, and shape them into opportunity. Opportunity for jobs and long-term employment, a more stable, safe and prosperous community, a revitalized language and culture, and an engaged citizenry. Each TCU is committed to improving the lives of its students and their families through higher education and to moving American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) to sustained contributors to the local, regional and national economies through job creation. To that end, TCUs serve many roles in their reservation communities, functioning as community centers, public libraries, tribal archives, entrepreneurial and business centers, computer labs, summer camps, community farms, economic development centers, high school equivalency training and testing centers, elder care centers, and more. They run day care centers, as well as conduct regional and reservation-based research addressing local needs and priorities.

TCUs serve students from well over 250 federally recognized tribes, many of whom face significant financial challenges: 85 percent of our students, including Native and non-Native, receive federal financial aid – primarily Pell grants. The average annual income of our students is about \$15,000 per year.

### THE ISSUES

The federal government, despite its direct trust responsibility and binding treaty obligations, has never fully funded TCU institutional operations as authorized under the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act of 1978. Yet despite funding challenges, TCUs are leading the nation in preparing AI/AN nurses and more recently, in preparing teachers for our Native schools. For example, half of all AI/AN special education teachers in Montana graduated from Salish Kootenai College. TCUs train other professionals in high-demand fields, including law enforcement, agriculture and natural resources management, and IT. By teaching the job skills most in demand on our reservations, TCUs are laying a solid foundation for tribal economic growth, with benefits for surrounding communities, and the nation as a whole.

Nonetheless, TCU leaders understand that is not enough, we must do more, we must move beyond simple workforce training. Today, TCUs are tackling the tougher – but much more significant – issue of job creation, because we know that to break the cycle of generational poverty and end the culture of dependency that grips so much of Indian Country, simply filling jobs that would be filled anyway is not enough. We must create new industries, new businesses, and a culture of self-sufficiency and innovation. Our job creation initiative initially

focuses on advanced manufacturing, through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Energy, National Laboratories, TCUs, and industry.

Tribal Colleges continually seek to instill a sense of hope and identity within Native youth, who one day will lead our tribal nations. Unfortunately, the high school drop-out rate for Native students remains around 50 percent. To help address this alarming reality, TCUs are partnering with the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Education to help create a lasting "college going culture" in American Indian middle and high schools. TCUs are reaching back to create a bridge for Indian students as early as the elementary school, encouraging them to abandon any notion of dropping out of high school and instead to think that the natural course is to finish high school and go on to the local TCU. In addition, TCUs offer dual credit courses for high school students, provide math teachers for local high schools as a strategy for improving course delivery, host Saturday academies, hold after school programs and summer camps for middle and high school students, and at the other end of the spectrum, offer GED/HiSet training and testing.

A recent independent, [economic impact study](#) proves that TCUs create lasting value from multiple perspectives: students, society, and taxpayers. TCUs elevate their students' lifetime incomes, and this in turn benefits society as a whole by increasing the region's economy and generating a wide array of savings through improved lifestyles. The increased employment benefits taxpayers through increased tax receipts and a reduction in the need for welfare and unemployment benefits. In fact, for every dollar spent the lifetime income of students more than quadruples; society gains over five times the investment in added income and social savings; and the taxpayers get back almost two and a half times the investment. In short, the TCUs are a very sound investment of federal funds—both fiscally and morally.

## **TCU PRIORITIES**

### **COLLEGE OPPORTUNITY, ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY:**

As part of President-Elect Trump's effort to ensure that it will be easier to access, pay for, and complete a two or four-year college degree or pursue a trade through a vocational/career and technical education program, the Administration should take a few modest steps to support TCU efforts to keep student costs low:

#### **Make TCU Title III, Part F grants permanent**

- We strongly urge the Administration to make permanent the TCU Title III, part F grants that are currently slated to sunset in FY 2019. These supplemental funds to the TCU Title III-A grants have been instrumental in advancing TCU capacity to serve their communities. Loss of this critical funding will cut the TCUs' Title III funding by more than 50 percent, which would be disastrous for our colleges and the rural areas in which they are located.

#### **Full operations funding for *all* Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)**

- An aggressive plan is needed for finally achieving and sustaining full funding of TCU institutional operations.

#### **Establish a Trump Executive Order on Tribal Colleges and Universities, with alternative/outside management of the Initiative's TCU Office**

- The first White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities was established in 1996, opening the door to new and expanded Federal opportunities for Tribal Colleges and Universities. However, President Obama failed to sign a separate TCU executive order. To increase efficiencies in federal agencies/tribal institution of higher education partnerships, we look to the Trump Administration to reinstate a separate Executive Order on Tribal Colleges and Universities, and to reduce duplication of effort, the functions of the TCU Initiative office should be administered through contract with the national organization that was established by and for Tribal Colleges and Universities.

**Repeal of Disastrous and Destructive Federal Regulations and Rules**

- We strongly urge the new Administration to relieve TCUs, and other institutions of higher education, from the glut of needless and burdensome regulations that have been imposed in the past several years. Accountability is important. But, the number of new regulations/rules imposed on institutions of higher education, including the Department of Labor's 2016 Final Overtime Rule, places a significant and wholly unnecessary burden on already over-taxed TCU staff and administration.

**Repeal the Designation & Funding of So-Called “Native American Serving Institutions-Non Tribal”**

- We urge the Administration to exercise its leadership and instruct the Congress to recognize Tribal Sovereignty and repeal Higher Education Act Title III section 319 that authorizes the Native American Serving Institutions-Non Tribal program. TCUs have a special relationship with the Federal government is based on their status as extensions of the federally recognized Indian Tribes that chartered them. Tribes have signed binding treaties with the Federal government that include certain responsibilities, including education, in exchange for millions of acres of land. The Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act exists – and Federal resources are allocated to TCUs – because of these treaties and the Federal Trust responsibility. In short, this is solely a political, and not race-based, distinction. Funding of TCUs raises no affirmative action issues. This program, however, does.

**JOB CREATION & SAFE COMMUNITIES:**

To ensure that *all* of America is included in President-elect Trump's job creation, full-employment, and infrastructure programs, the first Americans cannot be forgotten. Tribal Colleges and their rural American Indian/Alaska Native communities, need to be specifically included in any new initiatives. In addition:

**Trump Infrastructure Initiative:** Should separate or private funding be secured, TCUs and their respective communities have shovel ready projects listed at a combined cost of \$250 million. Addressing the immediate infrastructure and construction needs on the TCU campuses and the communities that are home to our institutions will help to ensure that much needed facilities and jobs are created throughout Indian Country. Additionally, increasing funding for proven TCU programs, including USDA-Rural Development's TCU Essential Community Facilities Program, DoEd TCUHEA Title III-A should be an integral component of any Trump infrastructure initiative.

**Establish parity in opportunity and funding for 1994 Land-Grant Institutions (TCUs) as members of the federal land-grant system.**

- Provide real funding equity for the various 1994 land-grant programs.
- Increase the capacity of the 1994 land-grant institutions to successfully compete for additional research grants that could be the key to addressing some of the most critical issues facing Tribal communities.
- Allow the 1994 land-grant institutions to compete for Smith-Lever 3(d) administered grant funds that are currently available to every other category of land-grant institutions.

**Support Local Decision-making in Tribal Education.**

- Currently, the nation's federally recognized tribes must follow the decision of states in determining what high school equivalency exam will be employed. With the recent changes to the GED test, some tribes whose reservations are located within the boundaries of states that sanction the GED test are interested in using the HiSET or other nationally accepted tests. As sovereign nations, tribes should have the right to decide which exam to use and states should be required to work with these tribes to develop joint high school equivalency certifications.

**STUDENT ENGAGEMENT & ADVANCEMENT:**

**Recognize uniqueness of Tribal College students and ensure that participation in the Federal student**

**loan program must remain voluntary at the institution level.** TCUs are the most affordable institutions in higher education and only two TCUs currently participate in federal student loan programs. Some TCUs are beginning to explore the federal loan programs, as more are offering an increasing number of bachelor's and master's degrees. However, TCUs work hard to keep tuition low to allow their students, especially those planning to seek advanced degrees, to graduate without debt. That goal, along with limited institutional resources to administer loan programs, has led the vast majority of TCUs to avoid federal student loans. Mandating loan program participation and tying institutional Title IV eligibility to loan performance metrics will unnecessarily impede Native and other low-income students from pursuing, let alone achieving, higher education goals. TCUs need flexibility to create aid programs that meet the needs of their students and communities.

**Support for the Priorities of the American Association of Community Colleges.** Tribal Colleges and Universities support the priorities and recommendations submitted to the President-Elect Trump's Transition Team.

### TCU FACTS & FIGURES

- **Breaking the cycle of generational poverty:** Tribal Colleges and Universities provide access to higher education for American Indians/Alaska Natives and others living in some of the nation's most isolated and economically depressed areas. In fact, the median household income of a TCU student is \$17,641, nearly 30 percent below the national poverty line (\$24,300), and nearly 70 percent below the median household income nationwide (\$53,482).
- **Growing number of TCUs:** Since 1981, when TCUs first received federal operating funding, the number of tribal colleges has more than quadrupled and continues to grow; and the number of Indian students enrolled has risen over 300 percent. During the Obama Administrations, two more TCUs became eligible for funding under Title I of the Tribal College Act, and one or two colleges are expected to be added to the list as of FY 2018. Today, several tribes in California, Alaska, New York, New Mexico, Arizona, and Oklahoma are expressing an interest in potentially establishing their own tribal college. While AIHEC celebrates the growing number of tribally chartered colleges and the increasing numbers of Native students served, these successes translate to *decreased* funding for all TCUs unless our operating accounts are increased proportionally.
- **Local Tax and Revenue Bases:** TCUs cannot rely on a local tax base for revenue. Although tribes have the sovereign authority to tax, high reservation poverty rates, the trust status of reservation lands, and the lack of strong reservation economies hinder the creation of a reservation tax base. As noted earlier, on Indian reservations that are home to TCUs, the unemployment rate can exceed 70 percent. By contrast, the national unemployment rate is currently 4.9 percent.
- **Gaming and the TCUs:** Although several of the reservations served by TCUs have gaming operations, the vast majority are not mega-casinos located in urban areas and featured in the news media. Only a few TCUs receive regular income from their tribe's gaming operations, and the amounts received vary from year to year. Most reservation casinos are small businesses that use their gaming revenue to improve the local standard of living and potentially diversify into other, more sustainable areas of economic development. In the interim, where relevant, local TCUs offer courses in casino management and hospitality services to formally train tribal members to work in their local tribally run casinos.

Some form of gaming is legalized in 48 states, but the federal government has not used the revenues generated from state gaming as a justification to decrease federal funding to other public colleges or universities. Some have suggested that those tribes that operate the few extremely successful and widely publicized casinos should be financing higher education for all American Indians. And yet, no state is expected to share its gaming revenue with a less successful or non-gaming state.