

**STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM
SUBMITTED TO THE UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

March 31, 2006

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) and the 33 Tribal Colleges and Universities that comprise the list of 1994 Land Grant Institutions, thank you for this opportunity to share our funding requests for Fiscal Year 2007 (FY07).

This statement is presented in three parts: a) a summary of our FY07 funding recommendation, b) a brief background on Tribal Colleges and Universities, and c) an outline of the 1994 Tribal College Land Grant Institutions' plan for using our land grant programs to fulfill the agricultural potential of American Indian communities, and to ensure that American Indians have the skills and support needed to maximize the economic development potential of their resources.

I. Summary of Requests

We respectfully request the following funding levels for FY07 for our land grant programs established within the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) and Rural Development mission areas. In CSREES, we specifically request: \$12 million payment into the Native American endowment fund; \$3.3 million for the higher education equity grants; \$5 million for the 1994 institutions' competitive extension grants program; \$3 million for the 1994 Institutions' competitive research grants program; and in Rural Development - Rural Community Advancement Program (RCAP), that \$5 million be provided for each of the next five fiscal years for the tribal college community facilities grants program. RCAP grants help to address the critical facilities and infrastructure needs at the colleges that impede our ability to participate fully as land grant partners.

II. Background on Tribal Colleges and Universities

The first Morrill Act was enacted in 1862 specifically to bring education to the people and to serve their fundamental needs. Today, over 140 years after enactment of the first land grant legislation, the 1994 Land Grant Institutions, as much as any other higher education institutions, exemplify the original intent of the land grant legislation, as they are truly community-based institutions.

The Tribal College Movement was launched in 1968 with the establishment of Navajo Community College, now Diné College, serving the Navajo Nation. Rapid growth of tribal colleges soon followed, primarily in the Northern Plains region. In 1972, the first six tribally controlled colleges established the American Indian Higher Education Consortium to provide a support network for member institutions. Today, AIHEC represents 34 Tribal Colleges and Universities - 33 of which comprise the list of 1994 Land Grant Institutions located in 12 states - created specifically to serve the higher education needs of American Indian students. Annually, they serve approximately 30,000 full- and part-time students from over 250 Federally recognized tribes.

All of the 1994 Land Grant Institutions are accredited by independent, regional accreditation agencies and like all institutions of higher education, must undergo stringent performance reviews to retain their

accreditation status. Tribal colleges serve as community centers by providing libraries, tribal archives, career centers, economic development and business centers, public meeting places, and child care centers. Despite their many obligations, functions, and notable achievements, tribal colleges remain the most poorly funded institutions of higher education in this country. Most of the 1994 Land Grant Institutions are located on Federal trust territory. Therefore, states have no obligation and in most cases, provide no funding to tribal colleges. In fact, most states do not even fund our institutions for the non-Indian state residents attending our colleges, leaving the tribal colleges to absorb the per student operational costs for non-Indian students enrolled in our institutions, accounting for approximately 20 percent of our student population. Under these inequitable financing conditions and unlike our state land grant partners, our institutions do not benefit from economies of scale – where the cost per student to operate an institution is diminished by the increased size of the student body.

As a result of 200 years of Federal Indian policy—including policies of termination, assimilation and relocation—many reservation residents live in abject poverty comparable to that found in Third World nations. Through the efforts of Tribal Colleges and Universities, American Indian communities are receiving services they need to reestablish themselves as responsible, productive, and self-reliant citizens. It would be regrettable not to expand the very modest investment in, and capitalize on, the human resources that will help open new avenues to economic development, specifically through enhancing the 1994 Institutions' land grant programs, and securing adequate access to information technology.

III. 1994 Land Grant Programs—Ambitious Efforts to Reach Economic Development Potential

Tragically, due to lack of expertise and training, millions of acres on our reservations lie fallow, under used, or have been developed through methods that render the resources nonrenewable. The Equity in Educational Land Grant Status Act of 1994 is starting to rectify this situation and is our hope for future advancement.

Our current land grant programs are small, yet very important to us. It is essential that American Indians explore and adopt new and evolving technologies for managing our lands. We have the potential of becoming significant contributors to the agricultural base of the nation and the world.

Native American Endowment Fund: Endowment installments that are paid into the 1994 Institutions' account remain with the U.S. Treasury. Only the annual interest, less the USDA's administrative fee, is distributed to the colleges. The latest gross annual interest yield (FY05) is \$2,577,357 after the USDA's administrative fee of \$103,094 is deducted; \$2,474,263 is the amount available to be distributed among all of the eligible 1994 Land Grant Institutions by statutory formula. While we have not yet been provided the latest breakdown of funds distributed to each of the 1994 institutions, last year USDA's administrative fee amounted to more than the payment amounts to 75 percent of the 1994 Land Grant Institutions. After the distribution amounts are determined for this year's disbursement, we fully expect similar results. We respectfully ask that the Subcommittee review the Department's administrative fee and consider reducing it for this program, so that more of these already limited funds can be utilized to conduct vital 1994 Land Grant community based programs.

Just as other land grant institutions historically received large grants of land or endowments in lieu of land, this endowment assists 1994 Land Grant Institutions in establishing and strengthening our academic programs in such areas as curricula development, faculty preparation, instruction delivery, and to help address critical facilities and infrastructure issues. Many of the colleges have used the endowment funds in

conjunction with the Education Equity Grant funds to develop and implement their academic programs. As earlier stated, tribal colleges often serve as primary community centers and although conditions at some have improved substantially, many of the colleges still operate under less than satisfactory conditions. In fact most of the tribal colleges cite improved facilities as one of their highest priorities. Several of the colleges have indicated the need for immediate and substantial renovations to replace buildings that have long exceeded their effective life spans and to upgrade existing facilities to address accessibility and safety concerns.

Endowment payments increase the size of the corpus held by the U.S. Treasury and thereby increase the annual interest yield disbursed to the 1994 land grant institutions. This additional funding would be very helpful in our efforts to continue to support faculty and staff positions and program needs within Agriculture and Natural Resources departments, as well as to continue to help address the critical and very expensive facilities needs at our institutions. Currently, the amount that each college receives from this endowment is not adequate to address curricula development and instruction delivery, as well as make even a dent in the necessary facilities projects at the colleges. In order for the 1994 Institutions to become full partners in this nation's great land grant system, we need and frankly, under treaty obligations, warrant the facilities and infrastructure necessary to fully engage in education and research programs vital to the future health and well being of our reservation communities. *We respectfully request the subcommittee fund the FY07 endowment payment at \$12 million, \$120,000 above FY06 and the in the President's Budget recommendation – restoring the across-the-board cut imposed on FY06 appropriated levels.*

1994 Institutions' Educational Equity Grant Program: Closely linked with the endowment fund, this program is designed to assist 1994 land grant institutions with academic programs. Through the modest appropriations made available since FY01, the tribal colleges have been able to begin to support courses and plan activities specifically targeting the unique needs of their respective communities.

The 1994 Institutions have developed and implemented courses and programs in natural resource management; environmental sciences; horticulture; forestry; bison production and management; and especially food science and nutrition to address epidemic rates of diabetes and cardiovascular disease on reservations. If more funds were available through the Educational Equity Grant Program, tribal colleges could channel more of their endowment yield to supplement other facilities funds to address their critical infrastructure issues. Authorized at \$100,000 per eligible 1994 Institutions, in FY06, approximately \$68,000 or two-thirds of the authorized level was available to the 1994 institutions, after across-the-board cuts and Department fees were applied to the initial appropriated level of \$2,250,000. *We respectfully request full funding of \$3.3 million to allow the tribal colleges to build upon the courses and successful activities that have been launched.*

Extension Programs: The 1994 Institutions' extension programs strengthen communities through outreach programs designed to bolster economic development; community resources; family and youth development; natural resources development; agriculture; as well as health and nutrition awareness.

In FY06, \$3,273,000 was appropriated for the 1994 Institutions' competitive extension grants, a slight increase over FY05. Without adequate funding, 1994 Institutions' ability to maintain existing programs and to respond to emerging issues such as food safety and homeland security, especially on border reservations, is severely limited. Increases in funding are needed to support these vital programs designed to address the inadequate extension services provided to Indian reservations by their respective state programs. It is important to note that the 1994 extension program is designed to complement the Indian

Reservation Extension Agent program and does not duplicate extension activities. 1994 Land Grant programs are funded at very modest levels. The tribal college land grants have applied their ingenuity for making the most of every dollar they have at their disposal by leveraging funds to maximize their programs whenever possible. For example, College of Menominee Nation (CMN) in Keshena, Wisconsin, has a multiyear program that leverages funding from several activities to expand its extension program, which focuses on strengthening the economic capacity of the local community. Partnering with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, CMN is designing curriculum that involves tribal elders, relevant service providers, local schools, the Commission on Aging, and health clinics designed to encourage minority youth to enter Allied Health fields. With a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, the college's extension and outreach offers the Transportation Alliance for New Solutions (TrANS) program. This is a 120 hour program designed to train women and minorities in roads construction. In addition, the Federal Highway Administration and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation have provided grant funds to CMN extension and outreach to conduct a Summer Transportation Institute focusing on middle school students. Students spend four weeks exploring various careers within the transportation industry. CMN is just one example of the innovative programs being conducted at 1994 Institutions. *To continue and expand these successful programs, we request the Subcommittee support this competitive program by appropriating \$5 million to sustain the growth and further success of these essential community based programs.*

1994 Research Program: As the 1994 Land Grant Institutions have begun to enter into partnerships with 1862/1890 land grant institutions through collaborative research projects, impressive efforts to address economic development through land use have come to light. Our research program illustrates an ideal combination of Federal resources and tribal college-state institutional expertise, with the overall impact being far greater than the sum of its parts. We recognize the budget constraints under which Congress is functioning. However, \$1,039,000, the FY06 appropriated level, is a 4.4 percent decrease in funding that was already grossly inadequate. This research program is vital to ensuring that tribal colleges may finally become full partners in the nation's land grant system. Many of our institutions are currently conducting agriculture based applied research, yet finding the resources to conduct this research to meet their communities' needs is a constant challenge. This research authority opens the door to new funding opportunities to maintain and expand the research projects begun at the 1994 Institutions, but only if adequate funds are appropriated. \$1,039,000 for 33 institutions to compete for is clearly inadequate. Project areas being studied include soil and water quality, amphibian propagation, pesticide and wildlife research, range cattle species enhancement, and native plant preservation for medicinal and economic purposes. *We strongly urge the Subcommittee to fund this program at a minimum of \$3 million to enable our institutions to develop and strengthen their research potential.*

Rural Community Advancement Program (RCAP): In FY06, \$4,464,000 of the RCAP funds appropriated for loans and grants to benefit Federally recognized American Indian tribes were targeted for community facility grants for improvements at Tribal Colleges and Universities. This amounts to an increase of \$464,000 over the level that had been allocated to the program each year since it began in FY01. This program requires a minimum 25 percent non-Federal match. Tribal colleges are chartered by their respective tribes, which enjoy a government-to-government relationship with the Federal government. Due to this relationship, tribal colleges have very limited access to non-Federal dollars making non-Federal matching requirements a significant barrier to our colleges' ability to compete for much needed funds. The 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, (Public Law 107-171) included language limiting the non-Federal match requirement for the Rural Cooperative Development Grants to no more than 5 percent in the case of a 1994 institution. We would like to have this same language applied to the RCAP community

facilities grants for tribal colleges to open the door to more 1994 Institutions to compete for these dollars. *We urge the Subcommittee to designate \$5 million for each of the next five fiscal years to afford the 1994 institutions the means to aggressively address critical facilities needs, thereby allowing them to better serve their students and respective communities. Additionally, we request that Congress include language directing the agency to limit the non-Federal matching requirement to not more than 5 percent, the same level as applied to the Rural Cooperative Development Grants program, to help the 1994 land grant institutions to effectively address critical facilities and construction issues at their institutions.*

IV. Conclusion

The 1994 Land Grant Institutions have proven to be efficient and effective vehicles for bringing educational opportunities to American Indians and hope for self-sufficiency to some of this nation's poorest regions. The modest Federal investment in the 1994 Land Grant Institutions has already paid great dividends in terms of increased employment, education, and economic development. Continuation of this investment makes sound moral and fiscal sense. American Indian reservation communities are second to none in their potential for benefiting from effective land grant programs and as earlier stated no institutions better exemplify the original intent of the land grant concept than the 1994 Land Grant Institutions.

We appreciate your support of the Tribal Colleges and Universities and we ask you to renew your commitment to help move our communities toward self-sufficiency. We look forward to continuing our partnership with you, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the other members of the nation's land grant system—a partnership that will bring equitable educational, agricultural, and economic opportunities to Indian Country.

Thank you for this opportunity to present our funding proposals to this Subcommittee. We respectfully request your continued support and full consideration of our Fiscal Year 2007 appropriations requests.