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Contact: Gerald Gipp
703-838-0400, ext. 110

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AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM APPLAUDS OPENING OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

Alexandria, VA – The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), comprised of 35 American Indian tribally controlled colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, applauds the opening of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). "This is an exciting time for Indian people," said Dr. Joseph McDonald, president of AIHEC and Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, MT. "For the past three decades, tribal colleges and universities have been working to preserve and vitalize our cultures and traditions. Now, we have an important collaborative resource. NMAI opens new windows for Indian people to share information vital to our history, cultures, and native languages and for others to understand and learn about our unique role as indigenous peoples."

The nation's 34 tribal colleges and universities serve as stewards of Native culture, traditions, and language in Indian Country. They maintain tribal archives, operate tribal museums and libraries, and preserve and teach native languages. Through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 30 tribal colleges recently constructed Cultural Learning Centers on their campuses. These centers provide tribal communities with a structure that allows them a place to protect, sustain, and celebrate tribal material, culture, traditions, and life ways. "NMAI provides a new and highly visible venue for celebrating our cultures and telling the stories of Native people in our Nation's Capitol," said Dr. McDonald.

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Since 1972, AIHEC has served as the collective spirit and voice of our nation's TCUs, advocating on behalf of institutions of higher education that are defined and controlled by their respective tribal nations. Today, 35 tribal colleges educate Indian people in 12 states (Arizona, California, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North and South Dakota, Washington, Wisconsin) and Canada.