

Ben Nighthorse Campbell
United States Senate
Washington, DC

Dear Friend,

I am proud to be a board member of the American Indian College Fund, a position that enables me to speak to so many of you who share with me a deep concern for Indian people. Too many Native Americans continue year in and year out to suffer and struggle. For my people, the past has been bleak: unemployment figures ranging from 50% to 85%, the lowest life expectancy and highest rate of diabetes, tuberculosis, and alcoholism of any group in the United States, and a high school drop-out rate among our young people that surpasses all others.

As a Senator and as an Indian, I am committed to doing all I can to lighten the burden of poverty by supporting those grassroots institutions that are bringing about change. I believe the growing band of 29 American Indian colleges are absolutely crucial to the survival and growth of our Native American communities. In spite of the harsh statistics, there is great wisdom and courage in Indian country. Their survival is so important that I cannot just sit by. I must act and ask you to act, too.

The American Indian colleges are, in my opinion, unique. It is remarkable that, in just a decade or two, a network of 29 institutions has emerged. This educational movement is so young that you might not know a great deal about it. In the hope that you will support these schools, I want to give you information about their work and their impact on Indian communities.

*Students range in age from 17 to 70. Some are recent high-school graduates, but most are older, often women with families to care for and support.

*Over 80% of the students live below the poverty line with annual per capital incomes of \$1,300 to \$5,000. Most are first generation college students who live on reservations where they have to travel great distances under difficult circumstances to attend classes.

*The 29 colleges are remarkable examples of adaptability and resourcefulness. While all of these institutions are shockingly underfunded and their administrations and faculty members struggle with severe restraints, the tribal colleges have managed not only to stay alive, but also to expand their services and creatively serve their students and their communities. Operating on a shoestring, the colleges house libraries, Head Start centers, alcohol and substance abuse clinics, economic development projects, and tribal archives.

*The first tribal college opened in 1968. There are 29 colleges located on or near reservations in twelve states - from California to Michigan and from Arizona to North Dakota. Together, these institutions serve over 16,000 students.