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TESTIMONY OF

MELVIN E MONETTE-BARAJAS

PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
INDIGENOUS EDUCATION, INC.

Before the

SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

Hearing on

“EXAMINING THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR’S LAND BUY-
BACK PROGRAM FOR TRIBAL NATIONS, FOUR YEARS LATER.”

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Chairman Barasso, Vice Chairman Tester, and distinguished Members of the Committee, my name is Melvin Monette-Barajas, I am an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians and I am pleased to appear today representing Indigenous Education, Incorporated (the Organization), the approved administrator for the Cobell Scholarship Program authorized by Congress in *Elouise Pepion Cobell, et al. v. Jewell* (the Cobell Settlement). Indigenous Education, Inc. welcomes the opportunity to assist this committee in its oversight of the Cobell Settlement.

Indigenous Education is a nonprofit scholarship administrator created for the express purposes of administering the Cobell Scholarship Program, following the resignation of two previous organizations. The opportunity to create an organization to give the Cobell Scholarship Program the single-focus necessary to design a scholarship program that focused on students, tribes, institutions and community was born through the aforementioned resignations. Combined, the Organization’s President and Executive Director, and the Director of Scholarship Programs have over 50 years of scholarship and student services experience focused on American Indian and Alaska Native students in higher education. The Organization employs five (5) full-time, one (1) part-time and two (2) seasonal-temporary employees in Albuquerque, New Mexico where scholarship processes are conducted via internet, postal service and telephone as necessary. To date, The Cobell Board of Trustees (CBOT) has authorized and the Organization and a predecessor have awarded more than \$5.25 Million to nearly 1,000 members of 138 US federally-recognized tribes attending 316 nonprofit public and private institutions of higher education as full-time and degree-seeking students pursuing vocational, undergraduate and graduate/professional degrees. In addition, the CBOT has authorized an additional \$500,000 for Summer 2017 term and the Organization will begin accepting applications for the scholarships within the next few months.

I am the Executive Director of Indigenous Education, Inc., and I am both honored and privileged to manage the Cobell Scholarship Program to carry out the wishes of the plaintiffs and the late Elouise Pepion Cobell to provide resources for access to higher education for Native people. I bring to the Organization work in institutions of higher education at the Tribal College level, regional and Research 1 institutions, state government (MN) and nonprofit management, as well as board membership as a scholarship advisor to several organizations. As a personal commitment, my advocacy comes from my own experiences, or lack of experiences, with funding for higher education. I am proud of the work that Indigenous Education, Inc. has accomplished in our first year in existence.

We understand and appreciate the financial needs associated with higher education for American Indian and Alaska Native students who have waited patiently for this scholarship program to be made available to them. We also acknowledge that the incentive to sell shares in Trust land to grow the scholarship corpus carries with it an unintended expectation that the “selling” individual, family or tribe will receive priority for scholarship assistance. To assist in the administration of scholarships, the Organization requests information from applicants that will assist staff in identifying these individuals; however, in understanding the financial aid process and requiring a minimum eligibility for selection, along with deadlines for quality management, not all “sellers” have received or will receive a scholarship without an increase in available scholarship funds. We have heard from tribes, families, and students and we are addressing their concerns while remaining aligned with industry standards and practices.

The Cobell Scholarship Program and Indigenous Education, Inc. as the Administrator

Elouise Cobell and a group of advisors advocated for the inclusion of a scholarship program to assist Native students to access and complete higher education at every level. While it may not have been apparent at the time, we now recognize that the Cobell Scholarship Program may serve as the principal perpetual legacy of the Settlement. This carries with it an awesome responsibility to continuously listen to Native students and communities and remain flexible in our administration of the program.

Having assumed the administration two-thirds of the way through an academic year, the Organization was charged with closing the year for first-year funded students, providing summer term funds to returning and new students, opening a new application and process for year two (2) of the program, designing all materials, and distributing all associated outreach and documents. It was the epitome of the proverbial “hit the ground running” for the organization. At this time, we are completing a review and revision of all processes associated with the scholarship program and in the coming days, will be launching the application process for year three (3) of the Cobell Scholarship Program – the Summer 2017 term and the 2017-2018 Academic Year.

In performing its functions, Indigenous Education, Inc. operates at the direction of its Board of Directors - Melvin E Monette-Barajas (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians), Kelly

Fayard (Poarch Creek Band of Indians), Clint Carroll (Cherokee Nation) and under the direction and oversight of the Cobell Board of Trustees. The Organization contracts with Academic Works, the leader in complete scholarship management, in utilizing its platform for applicants and staff. We also contract our website development and maintenance, technology support as needed, and all accounting services.

Indigenous Education, Inc. and the Cobell Scholarship Program Description

The Cobell Board of Trustees sets the minimum eligibility criteria. The eligibility criteria are noted below.

To be considered **eligible** for the Cobell Scholarship Program, **Applicants** must be

- Attending or planning to attend a non-profit public or private institution of higher education that is nationally, regionally and industry accredited; and,
- Able to submit a completed application of self-reported information by the annual stated deadline; and,
- Able to demonstrate academic excellence through submission of a current unofficial transcript and through submission of an Academic Reference; and,
- Able to demonstrate engagement in community as demonstrated through submission of a Community Reference; and,
- Seeking to obtain one of the following:
 - Vocational diploma, certification, certificate or AAS degree; or,
 - Undergraduate AA, AS, BA, BS or Post-baccalaureate degree; or,
 - Master's, Doctoral or Professional degree.
 - Post-doctoral work is considered on an individual basis.

Finalists are selected from a pool of all completed applications by external reviewers and upon selection must be able to demonstrate that they are indeed:

- A degree-seeking students attending a non-profit public or private institution; and,
- Enrolled full-time in academic study through submission of a course registration; and,
- Able to demonstrate financial need by subtracting all known/existing resources from the full cost of attendance with an end result in a positive “unmet need” per the institution’s office of financial aid submission of a Financial Need Analysis; and,
- Able to demonstrate US federally-recognized tribal enrollment through the tribe’s Office of Tribal Enrollment submission of a Tribal Enrollment Verification.

Awarded scholars are those students who meet all stated deadlines for the post-Finalist status. This group of “Scholars” and “Fellows” will receive multiple distributions throughout the regular academic year depending on the institution’s academic calendar. Several of these students are considered “Honorary” because they meet all eligibility and deadlines but have no demonstrated need. Honorary Scholars remain on distribution lists, receive all program updates and can access any student service provided by the organization and funds can be made available to them if their financial situation changes.

Indigenous Education, Inc. and the AY 16/17 Award Data

For the Inaugural Summer Scholarship Program 2016 term, 138 offers were made with 37 of those returning scholars from the 2015-2016 academic year. Recognizing the requirement for 80% of the available scholarship funds to be awarded to undergraduate students and the remaining 20% to graduate students, 101 undergraduates were awarded and 37 graduate students were awarded totaling \$366,318. The Organization funded students with an overall grade point

	Summer Term 2016 - Grade Point Average by Education Level					
Level	<2.9	3.0 – 3.49	3.5 – 4.0	Blanks	Average	Total
Freshmen	13	1	4	0	1.72	18
Sophomore	11	8	12	0	3.22	31
Junior	7	9	11	0	3.09	27
Senior	15	7	3	0	2.85	25
Masters	4	5	21	1 – PSI does not give GPA	3.46	31
Professional	0	1	1	0	3.44	2
Doctoral	0	0	4	0	3.92	4
Total	50	31	56	1	3.16	138

average (GPA) of 3.16 for the Summer term.

The Organization’s first regular academic year process is 2016/2017 with Summer 2017 yet to be administered. Applicants were required to submit an online General Application (demographic information), a Tribal Enrollment Form and a Financial Need Analysis to have a complete package on file. The latter two forms will be requested only from Finalists in the future. All information to complete an application package will be self-reported in the future with only Finalists requiring verification.

The Organization received 5540 visitors to the OASIS system of which 582 students were funded. These 582 scholars had a positive unmet need reported by their office of financial aid. Another 58 students are considered “Honorary Scholars” due to no or negative unmet need reported by the financial aid office, and are invited to participate in all scholarship recipient programs. This group of 640 Scholars has a combined average GPA of 3.833 as noted on the following page.

Academic Year 2016 – 2017 GPA by Education Level					
Status	<2.9	3.0 – 3.49	3.5 – 4.0	Average	Total
Freshmen	3	73	98	3.6	174
Sophomore	1	70	82	3.5	153
Junior	1	72	66	3.47	139
Senior	4	52	39	3.42	95
Masters	0	4	41	3.8	45
Professional	0	4	8	3.69	12
Doctoral	0	3	19	3.82	22
Total The	9	278	353	3.42	640

The Organization maintains waiting lists of students who were fully eligible but where all available funds had been exhausted these students can receive awards from returned funds, if any become available.

The Scholars group of 640 students attend 249 institutions, are enrolled in 116 US federally-recognized tribes and study in 35 different major areas. The selected scholars are a diverse group.

Combined Scholarship Data

To date, the Cobell Scholarship Program has provided funded 972 students – 846 undergraduate and 126 graduate students. They have received \$3,719,667.58 in scholarship awards and another \$1,532,748.42 is allocated for Winter quarter and Spring terms and \$500,000 has been authorized for Summer 2017 totaling \$5.75 million in scholarship allocations. These students claim residence in 41 states, attend 316 institutions in 44 states and England (IE will fund students attending foreign institutions so long as they meet all other criteria), and are enrolled in 133 tribes in 20 states. Collectively, 208 students attend(ed) 24 Tribal Colleges and Universities in 11 states; 6 are/were Graduate students, leaving 202 Undergraduate students.

Level of Study	Graduate	Undergraduate	Grand Totals
Number of Scholars	126	846	972
Academic Term	Total Individual Scholarships	Total Individual Scholarships	Total Scholarship Dollars
Sum of Semester-Fall 2015 (previous)	41	288	\$887,294.00
Sum of Semester-Spring 2016 (prev)	37	271	\$830,332.00

Sum of Quarter-Fall 2015 (previous)	1	34	\$62,234.00
Sum of Quarter-Winter 2016 (prev)	1	34	\$55,134.00
Sum of Quarter-Spring 2016 (prev)	1	20	\$31,796.00
Sum of Summer Term 2016 (IEI)	27	106	\$366,318.00
Sum of Semester-Fall 2016 Term (IEI)	74	507	\$1,486,559.00
Sum of Spring 2017 (IEI)	76	522	\$1,532,748.00
Sum of Summer Term 2017 - *Authorized	*20	*160	\$500,000.00
Sum of TOTAL	278 Individual Scholarships	1782 Individual Scholarships	\$5,752,415.00, for 2060 Individual Scholarships

The number of scholars receiving funding through Fall 2016 by state of residency for the top ten states includes:

State of Residency	Graduate Student Count	Graduate Student Awards	Undergrad Student Count	Undergrad Student Awards	Total Student Count	Total Student Awards
MT	8	\$61,664.00	110	\$400,949.22	118	\$462,613.22
NM	12	\$86,588.33	95	\$313,515.51	107	\$400,103.84
SD	5	\$31,318.00	98	\$366,435.67	103	\$397,753.67
ND	6	\$36,683.00	88	\$324,163.50	94	\$360,846.50
AZ	19	\$93,545.33	65	\$224,984.17	84	\$318,529.50
OK	9	\$51,982.50	74	\$277,384.96	83	\$329,367.46
CA	12	\$54,593.16	56	\$197,763.67	68	\$252,356.83
WA	16	\$91,132.66	50	\$150,260.70	66	\$241,393.36
MN	4	\$15,903.00	32	\$138,364.50	36	\$154,267.50
WI	1	\$5,000.00	25	\$81,054.00	26	\$86,054.00

Conclusion

We are proud of what we have accomplished to date and look forward to continuing the essential work of the Cobell Scholarship Program even after the Land Buyback Program has concluded to provide improved educational opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native students and to enable those students to then improve their own communities.

* * *

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That completes my testimony, and I would be happy to answer questions from the Committee.