

Tribal colleges tighten budgets amid federal funding worries

BY MARY STEURER
North Dakota Monitor

BISMARCK — Presidents of North Dakota’s tribal colleges say they’re preparing for lean years under President Donald Trump’s administration. Tribal colleges and universities faced a major funding scare earlier this year after the White House proposed slashing the Bureau of Indian Education’s budget by 90%, Indian Country Today reported. The bureau supports dozens of higher ed institutions serving Native communities across the country, including five in North Dakota.

Both chambers of Congress have since indicated they will keep the funding intact, meaning that the college presidents no longer expect any drastic budget

disruptions. Still, they said they plan to tighten their belts for the time being.

Twyla Baker, president of Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College, said her institution has had to make difficult decisions in light of the uncertainty — including eliminating some positions.

“I know that my facilities budget is so razor thin,” Baker said during a Wednesday, Sept. 3, panel discussion at the Tribal Leaders Summit at the Bismarck Event Center. “Nothing better break, because it’s going to be bubble gum and duct tape going forward from here.”

She likened the funding situation to a “shell game.” She said even though Congress is expected to approve the Bureau of Indian Education funding, Nueta

Hidatsa Sahnish College stands to lose out on money from grants from other sources. The college is scrambling to fill in the gaps, Baker said.

Turtle Mountain Community College President Wanda Parisien said her school had \$133,000 from the National Science Foundation cut.

For now, the college hasn’t had any other funding pulled, she said.

“We’re crossing our fingers and hoping that everything stays that way,” Parisien said.

The college presidents stressed that their institutions are major economic drivers for their communities, and provide affordable education to many low-income and first-generation students. Defunding their schools will negatively affect the whole state, they said.

Several presidents also

noted that the funding disruption comes at a time when their enrollment has gone up.

They also pointed to a recent impact study that found that for the 2022-23 fiscal year, North Dakota’s tribal college system brought in almost \$170 million to the state’s economy. That equated to roughly 2,100 jobs, according to the report.

“Some in-county students would have left Rolette County for other educational opportunities, if not for TMCC,” Parisien said.

North Dakota’s tribal colleges were established in the late 1960s and early 1970s to serve the five tribal communities that share land with the state. They play a central role in preserving the history, cultures and languages of the tribes, in addition to providing other post-sec-



Mary Steurer / North Dakota Monitor
Russ McDonald, president of United Tribes Technical College, speaks about the impact of federal funding disruptions at the Tribal Leaders Summit on Wednesday at the Bismarck Event Center.

ondary education.

“We need all the states that tribal colleges reside in to know the value of what it is that they have,” Baker said. “This is a good value, and it makes no sense whatsoever to cut funding for tribal colleges across the board.”

Russ McDonald, president of United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, said that his school is also being conservative with its budget

amid the federal funding changes. He said all tribal colleges and universities should be prepared to streamline their finances, but that he doesn’t think there’s a reason to panic.

“We’re going to be all right,” McDonald said. “We’ve been here before as tribal peoples — we’re resilient.”

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Former state lawmaker selected to fill vacancy in southeastern ND

BY MICHAEL ACHTERLING
North Dakota Monitor

BISMARCK — A former Republican lawmaker will represent District 25 in southeastern North Dakota, filling the position that has been vacant since Rep. Cindy Schreiber-Beck died in May.

The executive committee for District 25 Republicans selected former Rep. Kathy Skroch, R-Lidgerwood, to complete the remainder of the term.

Skroch beat out finalists Jason Heitkamp, a

former lawmaker and 2024 state superintendent candidate, and former Republican district chair Erik Nygren during the interview process with the district’s executive committee.

“I was completely humbled by the outcome,” Skroch said Wednesday.

Skroch represented District 26 in the Legislature from 2017 to 2022 and narrowly lost her 2022 reelection bid by 85 votes to Rep. Alisa Mitskog, D-Wahpeton, after redistricting combined portions of District 26 with districts 25 and 28.

Schreiber-Beck’s seat had remained vacant because the district’s reorganization meetings during the spring were

deemed invalid by the North Dakota Secretary of State’s Office, leaving NDGOP District 25 without an official chair or executive committee to make the appointment. The Republican district party was officially reorganized on Aug. 12 with Matt Evans becoming the new district party chair.

Sen. Larry Luick, R-Fairmount, a member of the District 25 executive committee, said he is excited to move on from the district’s leadership “hiccup” and thinks Skroch will represent the area well.

“She’s very friendly to everybody,” Luick said. “I think we’re going to do just fine.”

He touted her

wide-ranging experience as a benefit to her constituents. Skroch is a business owner through Vinnie’s Mud Bog in Lidgerwood, has experience in health care working previously in a geriatric care unit and has an agriculture past through framing and ranching in the area.

“I understand the importance of property rights and landowners’ rights and the impact that occurred with Richland County with the Fargo diversion and now the CO2 pipeline,” Skroch said. “I see the benefits, but I also see the risks to landowners when the big projects come in, or big corporate interests come in.”

She said she’d be willing to serve on any of the interim committees that she is selected for, but she said she believes she can contribute the most on the interim agriculture and human services committees.

Skroch added she could also provide insight on the interim education committee with her experience as a member of the Lidgerwood School Board and putting all seven of her children through the North Dakota public school system.

Skroch said she plans on running for election to the seat in 2026.

The North Dakota Legislature also has a vacancy in the Grand Forks area after Rep. Emily

O’Brien, R-Grand Forks, resigned to become deputy commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Sen. Claire Cory, R-Grand Forks, a member of the NDGOP District 42 executive committee, said the district received the official notice of vacancy on Tuesday. The committee is required to meet within 21 days to select O’Brien’s replacement.

Cory said anyone interested in filling the legislative seat should contact NDGOP District 42 Chair Kim Efta or email the district at nddistrict42@gmail.com.

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