



**Board of Regents of the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute
Special Meeting
February 21, 2025**

SIPI Hogan

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88981859657?pwd=F1wtcoVkvwoGmYnhrHjQBQIBpbIBJL.1>

A. Call the Meeting to Order

Chairperson Begaye called the meeting to order at 9:07 AM MST.

B. Welcome and Invocation

The Welcome and Invocation were given by Chair Begaye and Regent Peterson, respectively.

C. Roll Call

Present

Mr. Adam J. Begaye, Chair, Navajo Nation-New Mexico
Ms. Esther Peterson, Secretary/Treasurer, Navajo Nation-Arizona
Dr. John Bush, Member, Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona-South
Ms. Pablita Chavez SGA President (or designee)
Mr. Raymond Gachupin, Southern Pueblos Council
Mr. Francis Tafoya, Eight Northern Pueblos
Dr. Tamarah Pfeiffer, President, SIPI (Ex-Officio, non-voting member)

Absent

Ms. Tanya Lewis, Vice Chair, Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona-North
Mr. Timothy Harjo, SIPI Alumni
Mr. Alfred LaPaz, Mescalero Apache Tribe
Ms. Donna Montoya, Jicarilla Apache Nation

Vacant

Vacant, Oklahoma Tribes

D. Special Guests in Attendance:

Mr. Tony Dearman, Director, Bureau of Indian Education
Ms. Stephanie Conduff, Acting Director, BIA and Associate Director of Postsecondary Education
Ms. Jennifer Bell, Acting Chief of Staff, BIE
Ms. Jasmine Yepa, Field Representative Senator Heinrich's Office

E. Approval of the Agenda

Chair Begaye asked for a motion to amend the meeting agenda to include Resolution #1 2025-2: Resolution for Tribes and Tribal Governance to Support Exempting the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute from any Reduction in Workforce or Federal Hiring Freeze

Regent Bush made the motion to amend the agenda as suggested by Chair Begaye, with second by Regent Tafoya: 6 yes, 0 no. The amended agenda was approved. Resolution #1 2025-2 was placed under a new Item G on the agenda.

F. Discussion on Federal Layoffs

After introduction by Chair Begaye, Director Dearman asked Ms. Stephanie Conduff to lead the discussion on federal layoffs. Ms. Conduff indicated that layoffs occurred for probationary employees. The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) was not given the opportunity for input about federal layoffs. She also indicated that there was a data call to the Department of Interior, and reductions in force are occurring across the agency and the department. She noted that some SIPI employees took advantage of the “Fork In The Road” voluntary separation agreement with the federal government.

Regent Chavez asked if more layoffs are coming. Ms. Conduff believes so, based on a review of White House materials.

Inserted in the chat were two websites on Presidential Actions – The White House (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/>) and Secretary’s Orders | U.S. Department of the Interior (<https://www.doi.gov/document-library/secretary-order>)

Ms. Conduff acknowledged receiving concerns about SIPI’s reduction in force as related to accreditation, courses, public health and safety, student services, registration, grants and grants oversight, college operations, and the growth of SIPI. She mentioned that the BIE is communicating these concerns up to the Assistant Deputy Secretary for Policy and Development

Inserted in the meeting chat were impacts to SIPI:

Courses

Course Availability and Scheduling/ Loss of 7 Instructors:

SIPI lost 7 instructors for critical courses needed for graduation, impacting students' ability to progress and complete their programs. This directly affects student retention and graduation rates, as well as morale and trust in the institution.

Program-Specific Challenges/ Chemistry, Accounting, and Adult Basic Education:

Loss of the only full-time chemistry, accounting, and ABE reading instructors significantly limits course offerings going forward. This impedes students' ability to fulfill degree requirements, especially for specialized programs.

Specialized Accreditation Setback:

SIPI can no longer pursue Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) due to the lack of a full-time accounting instructor. This affects students' credit transferability and program reputation.

Program Reviews Disrupted:

Four programs were scheduled for academic program reviews this cycle. Three have no full-time faculty remaining, delaying the review process and affecting continuous improvement efforts.

Adjunct Limitations:

Reliance on adjunct faculty compromises program-level assessment reporting due to the transient nature of adjunct contracts, risking incomplete program review documentation.

President Pfeiffer wanted to clarify that SIPI receives forward funding, uses strategic planning and budgeting processes, and is not closing. She noted that SIPI has an adjunct contract with the University of New Mexico, so courses should not be impacted. Likewise, other Tribal Colleges and Universities have asked how they can volunteer to assist SIPI with the reductions in force. President Pfeiffer further indicated that no services to students have been reduced at this time. Ms. Conduff expressed honor and respect for Pfeiffer President. and her team.

Ms. Conduff led a discussion on the federal government's treaty and statutory responsibilities. The following information was inserted in the chat during this discussion:

In support of Trust and Treaty obligations, SIPI operates under the authority of the Snyder Act (25 U.S.C. § 13), which authorizes federal funding for American Indian education, health, and economic development. As a 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Institution under the Tribal College Land Grant Act (7 U.S.C. § 301 Sec. 532), SIPI is designated as a USDA Land Grant College and receives federal support for agricultural education, research, and community-based extension services. Under the provisions of Pub. L. 95-471, the Tribally Controlled Colleges or Universities Assistance Act of 1978, as amended by Pub. L. 110-315, the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) provides funding to operate SIPI.

Ms. Conduff indicated that the federal hiring freeze only enables one new employee hire for every four employee vacancies. She indicated that the BIE is working to exempt SIPI from the federal hiring freeze and rescind terminations all the way up to the White House. She reviewed the position titles for those who were terminated at the College. At this time, 17 SIPI employees have been terminated and four self-selected to the leave SIPI for a total of 21 terminations and voluntary separations.

Regent Bush asked if the reduction in force applies to the BIE's 12 schools. Director Dearman indicated not at the time. However, the BIE has been asked to provide a list of employees with core evaluations.

Regent Tafoya asked how will funding be effected by the staffing changes? Ms. Conduff indicated that we are unsure at this time. She mentioned that there might be a federal shut down on March 14th. However, because of forward funding, SIPI would not be part of that shut down.

Regent Bush asked about effects if the United States Department of Education is shut down. Ms. Conduff said that we do not have any guidance from the administration on what the impact would be.

Chair Begaye read questions from Vice Chair Lewis who could not attend this meeting. These questions and Ms. Conduff's responses are provided below.

1. When was SIPI made aware of the situation?

SIPI, Haskell Indian Nations University, and the BIE's K-12 leaders were made aware after the BIE learned of the situation. President Pfeiffer indicated that effects have been felt in faculty, instructional technology, tutors, and college operations.

2. How many positions impacted and impact on student services?

There were 17 terminations and four voluntary separations from SIPI. Mr. Monte Monteith expressed concerns about reductions in persistence and completion rates given the loss of tutors and instructional technology. He also expressed equal concern for the administrative reductions.

Director Dearman indicated the notification of terminations came on a Friday and had to be enacted the following Monday. He thanked the SIPI Administration for quickly acting on contingency plans to minimize the impacts to students.

3. What was President's plan for SIPI given the reductions in force?

Chair Begaye indicated that this was just covered in the last discussion (summarized above).

4. Why did SIPI not notify the Board of the situation?

Ms. Conduff indicated they were working on minimizing the student impact and the BIE is here when the SIPI Board of Regents is available.

Chair Begaye asked why there was no communication to the Board from the BIE or SIPI?

President Pfeiffer said that this is a moving target with lots of changes and communications have to be vetted by CALMS to ensure accuracy. She takes full responsibility for the lack of communication but is challenged to follow process and not to overstep her authority, noting that she is not authorized to put things in writing on this matter.

Mr. Monteith said 100% efforts went to saving employees and minimizing the impacts to students. He apologized for lack of communication.

Chair Begaye asked why has there been no press release sharing SIPI is not closing, the impacts associated with the reductions in force, and future plans. Ms. Conduff indicated that they have been working internally to protect employees from being terminated.

Chair Begaye acknowledged the work being done and how is it being handled. He also asked a one-page sheet is be developed (for the reasons stated above). He expressed concern that the SIPI Board of Regents and tribal leadership are only hearing about the matter secondhand. Ms. Conduff agreed with Chair Begaye's idea and will pursue it.

Chair Begaye asked if the SIPI Board of Regents is allowed to address media inquiries on this matter. Ms. Jennifer Bell said you can, but as federal employees they cannot coordinate these activities. Director Dearman added, our tribes and stakeholders are the muscle of the BIE. As non-federal employees, you can do what you need to do The BIE can provide information as long as it is not embargoed by the department.

Chair Begaye asked if two years was the standard probationary period for a federal employee. Ms. Conduff indicated probationary time periods are variable and determined in collaboration with the Office of Personnel Management.

Regent Peterson thanked SIPI and BIE for all of their work and Director Dearman for his attendance at this meeting. She asked for the BIE's continued support of SIPI. Ms. Conduff commented on the strength and resistance of Indian country.

Chair Begaye indicated that the SIPI Board of Regents will submit materials and/or send representative(s) to DC on this matter as needed. Ms. Conduff suggested working with House and Senate Committees on Indian Affairs.

Regent Peterson asked if the BIE would meet with the SIPI Board of Regents when they are in Albuquerque. Ms. Conduff agreed.

Chair Begaye concluded the discussion by thanking the BIE for their time, while stressing the importance of enhanced BIE and SIPI communication with the SIPI Board of Regents so the Board can meet its responsibilities to SIPI and the tribes.

Director Dearman, Ms. Conduff and Ms. Bell left the meeting.

G. Resolution #1 2025-2

President Pfeiffer recommended that the SIPI Board Resolution be specific to SIPI and that Board members send the AIHEC Resolution to their tribal governance structures for approval and submission.

Motion to approve the SIPI specific resolution made by Regent Tafoya, with second by Regent Gachupin: 6 yes, 0 no. The motion with President Pfeiffer's recommendations passed.

Resolution for Tribes and Tribal Governance to Support Exempting the
Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute From Any Reduction in Workforce or
Federal Hiring Freeze

Whereas, the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI), a national Indian community college and land grant institution authorized by Congress in partial fulfillment of treaty and trust responsibilities, offers 19 career technical training and transfer degree programs and adult and basic education services to students from the nation's 574 federally recognized tribes; and

Whereas, SIPI is a part of the United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Education (BIE); and

Whereas, the Mission of SIPI is to provide quality educational opportunities by preparing culturally diverse Native American students as life-long learners through partnerships with tribes, employers and other organizations; and

Whereas, SIPI is one of the Nation's oldest and only federally chartered Tribal Colleges are facing an immediate crisis due to the implementation of Executive Order 14210 and the White House Memorandum on Hiring Freezes; and

Whereas, in the last week, SIPI lost 21 employees - including key personnel in student safety and instructors. impacting the ability to provide course offerings, programs, and student support services; and

Whereas SIPI needs help to exempt it from the hiring freeze and reinstate employees terminated due to Executive Order 14210.

Therefore, be it resolved that the SIPI BOR calls upon all 574 federally recognized tribes to complete the following petition (shown on the next page) and forward it to their regional organization(s) (e.g., GPTCA, COLT, etc.) for the regional organization to pass and submit the resolution to Moriah O'Brien, (MOBrien@aihec.org), AIHEC's Vice President of Congressional and Federal Relations and to Mr. Bobby Wallace (bobby.wallace@sipibor.com), SIPI's Executive Director of the Development Office as quickly as possible.

CERTIFICATION

I, hereby, certify that the foregoing resolution was duly considered by the SIPI Board of Regents at a duly called meeting, at which a quorum was present and was passed by a vote of 6 in favor and 0 opposed, on this 21st day of February 2025.

Motion: Regent Tafoya
Second: Regent Gachupin

Adam J. Begaye, Chair
SIPI Board of Regents

**RESOLUTION TO EXEMPT THE SOUTHWESTERN INDIAN POLYTECHNIC
INSTITUTE AND HASKELL INDIAN NATIONS UNIVERSITY FROM ANY
REDUCTION IN WORKFORCE OR FEDERAL HIRING FREEZE**

WHEREAS, Tribal Nations are and always have been inherently sovereign governments that have political, government-to-government relationships with the United States; and

WHEREAS, many treaties have provided Tribal Nations with guaranteed rights to Tribal self-government, protection, safety, education, and economic development; and

WHEREAS, the United States' obligation to Tribal Nations is based on their political status as Indians – a status that is unique to Indians and enshrined in the U.S. Constitution; and

WHEREAS, the relationship between Tribal Nations and the U.S. government has been defined in statute and case law as a political relationship that further distinguishes Indian programs from federally funded programs and policies for the general public; and

WHEREAS, the United States fulfills its legal trust and treaty obligations through both the direct delivery of Tribal programs and services provided by federal agencies and through the provision of federal staff and dollars to Tribal Nations; and

WHEREAS, essential educational services to Tribal Nations are offered through two federally operated institutions of higher education (Haskell Indian Nations University and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute) through the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) of the Department of the Interior; and

WHEREAS, Haskell Indian Nations University (HINU), located in Lawrence, KS, has been in continuing existence since its creation in 1884 as a boarding school (Indian Industrial Training School) focused on agricultural education for grades one (1) through five (5) and in 1970 grew to become Haskell Indian Junior College and in 1990 became HINU; and

WHEREAS, HINU serves 1052 students from 146 Tribal Nations and offers two (2) certificate programs, ten (10) associate programs, four (4) bachelor's programs, and almost 180 Full-time Equivalent (FTE) staff to provide essential services; and

WHEREAS, Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI), located in Albuquerque, NM, was established in 1971 by the federal government in response to the need for education and training opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native students; and

WHEREAS, SIPI serves 323 students from 40 Tribal Nations and, as a vocational training center, focuses on science, technology, and mathematics (STEM) education, along with other vocational and technical programs through 13 associate programs, seven (7) certificate programs, and almost 100 FTE staff to provide essential services; and

WHEREAS, HINU and SIPI are accredited through the Higher Learning Commission and are a part of the Land-Grant family as of 1994 through the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act; and

WHEREAS, as federal institutions, all staff at HINU and SIPI are federal employees whose functions are in service of fulfilling the trust and treaty obligations to Indian Country; and

WHEREAS, the White House has stated that reducing the federal workforce is an Administration priority, and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has now put in place a memorandum of a hiring freeze and ordered most Federal agencies to lay off probationary employees immediately; and

WHEREAS, we understand that, pursuant to the hiring freeze memorandum of January 20, 2025, and Executive Order (EO) 14210, Implementing the President's "Department of Government Efficiency" Workforce Optimization Initiative, more than 27 percent of HINU and 24 percent of SIPI's workforce may be reduced, representing vital instructors, school safety personnel, and key leadership positions that could harm the institutions' accreditation status; and

WHEREAS, institutions will have to cancel classes, reduce student enrollment, and limit student support activities and services (tutoring, free meals, advising, etc.) to accommodate the loss of employees and restrictions from hiring staff to safely provide services to students enrolled; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the [TRIBE/TRIBAL ORGANIZATION] formally supports the exemption of HINU and SIPI in the implementation of the White House memorandum and EO 14210 directing the termination of probationary and hiring freeze of Federal employees; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge OPM, alongside every Agency Head and Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) team lead, to ensure that employees whose functions are in service of fulfilling the trust and treaty obligations to Indian Country are exempted from this and further comprehensive actions towards workforce or federal funding reductions; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, we call upon OPM and the Department of the Interior to issue a blanket exemption from any workforce reductions for all employees of the two (2) federally funded institutions of higher education and the BIE, and all other Tribal offices throughout all Federal agencies, as well as other Federal employees whose role is to deliver services or funding to Tribal programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that OPM, Office of Management and Budget, and respective Departments and Agencies immediately conduct Tribal Consultation to understand the critical services provided to Indian Country and the grave impact these staffing changes will have; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be the policy of the [TRIBE/TRIBAL ORGANIZATION] until it is withdrawn or modified by a subsequent resolution.

H. Public Comment

Regent Gachupin stated lack of communication between SIPI and BOR was a concern of the Board. He suggested to President Pfeiffer that you have a Board representative on campus in Bobby Wallace. He asked that she consider inviting him to some of your meetings, so he can relay information to the Board and you can tend to your important work. He added that this structure is necessary for the Board to be strong advocates from SIPI.

Regent Chavez asked how do I explain all of this to students? President Pfeiffer suggested mentioning SIPI is protected under two statutes and the College is forward funded, so it will not be effected by a (pending) federal shutdown. President Pfeiffer also suggested students should be registering for their summer classes and they should feel comfortable planning for the summer and the new semester system that will start in the fall.

I. Announcements

1. The remainder of the 2025 BOR Meeting Schedule and Commencement will be:
 - i. April 17: Quarter 2 Meeting.
 - ii. April 18: Commencement.
 - iii. July 7: Quarter 3 Meeting:
 - iv. October 6: Quarter 4 Meeting.

J. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn by Regent Bush, with second by Regent Tafoya: 6 yes, 0 no. The meeting adjourned at 11:44 AM MST.

Respectively Submitted,
Joseph Rives, Ph.D., Recording Secretary