

# NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**April 19, 2018**

**AIHEC'S Carrie Billy: 'If it is to be, it is up to me'**

*AIHEC president/CEO delivers uplifting message to Diné College students*

**TSAILE, Ariz.** — Education is a continuous cycle of growth and learning at Diné College is no exception.

The cultural development contributing to the forward momentum of Navajo education shows no sign of slowing, the president and Chief Executive Officer of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium told a group gathered for a short talk April 11 — an event commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Diné College.

"I am so proud to be here among some very remarkable men and women," the Navajo-born Carrie Billy, said. "There is tremendous power in higher education. Everything our people need is right here in this circle called (Diné College)."

Billy attended Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Mont., graduated from the University of Arizona and the Georgetown University Law School, and spoke about Native American identity and the importance of tribal colleges. She spoke about Navajo culture past and present, mentioning icons like chief Manuelito. Manuelito was a war chief before and after the (Navajo) Long Walk Period.

"I hope every person is proud to be a part of the tribal college system," Billy said. "Our future is in the hands and the hearts of our children who are here. A tribal college education gives students the power that they need."

Billy said each time she speaks at a tribal college or university, she recites, "If it is to be, it is up to me," an age-old passage that stipulates that success is for those who truly want it. A Black Mesa, Ariz., native, Billy stressed the importance of job creation and land management around the Navajo Nation.

"You never walk alone," Billy said. "You are the spirit of the tribal college," adding that most successful Native Americans have attended a tribal college or university.

In responding to a question from the 40-plus members of the audience about tribal college enrollment trends, Billy said dual credit programs are essential in that they reach out to high-schoolers and get students immediately involved in early education curriculum.

Billy noted that the primary thing that keeps prospective students from a college education — finances — is non-existent at Diné College. The college operates six campuses in Arizona and New Mexico and is the first tribally-controlled institution of higher education in the U.S. — and also the most affordable in Arizona at \$55 per credit hour.

"This is a place to rebuild our people," Billy said.

Billy's appearance was part of Diné College's 2018 Speaker Series that highlights the various activities happening college-wide. Those activities include a planned gala and a golf fundraiser.

In 1973, the first six American tribally-controlled colleges established AIHEC to provide a support network to influence federal policies on American Indian higher education.

Billy served as the inaugural executive director of the White House Initiative on tribal colleges under former President Bill Clinton and she worked in the U.S. Senate for 10 years.