Act helps spur tribal economic development activity in Indian Country

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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Tara Mac Lean Sweeney today announced she has approved a business leasing ordinance submitted by the Catawba Indian Nation in South Carolina under the Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Homeownership (HEARTH) Act. The Act establishes the authority of federally recognized tribes to develop and implement their own laws governing the long-term leasing of Indian lands for residential, business, agricultural, renewable energy, and other purposes.

With the Assistant Secretary's action and pursuant to the HEARTH Act, the Nation is now authorized to enter into business leases on its trust lands without further approval by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

"With its business leasing regulations approved, the Catawba Indian Nation is now better positioned to pursue its economic development goals," **Assistant Secretary Sweeney** said. "The HEARTH Act is making a positive difference for tribes with approved land leasing regulations by opening Indian Country for business. It is an important way for them to bring the benefits of entrepreneurship and enterprise to their communities."

"For decades, the Catawba people have sought to become economically self-sufficient and to put behind us years of economic difficulty," said **Catawba Indian Nation Chief William Harris**. "Assistant Secretary Sweeney's approval of our business lease ordinance greatly advances us along the path of self-sufficiency, empowering us to make decisions for ourselves with regard to the best business uses for our land. We intend to establish businesses which will lift up our people and our neighbors, as well. Interior has been very supportive of the Catawba Nation's economic initiatives, for which we are deeply appreciative."

"We have righted a great wrong," said **U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina)**. "This is great news for Catawba Nation and people in these border areas who will see an increase in employment opportunities. I want to thank the Trump Administration for their work in making this happen and all of those who fought long and hard with the Catawba Nation to turn this dream into a reality. For too long the Catawba Nation was treated unfairly by the federal government. That is no longer the case."

A tribe with land leasing regulations approved by the Secretary of the Interior, which include an environmental review process set forth in the HEARTH Act, can negotiate and enter into business leases without further Secretarial approval. By granting tribes greater autonomy to regulate leasing on their trust lands, the Act greatly expedites leasing for economic development in Indian Country.

In addition, since it authorizes tribes to negotiate and enter into agricultural and business leases of tribal trust lands with a primary term of 25 years and up to two renewal terms of 25 years each without the Secretary's approval, the Act also facilitates long-term economic stability in tribal communities.

With today's announcement, the number of tribes whose leasing regulations have been approved under the HEARTH Act now stands at 51.

Signed on July 30, 2012, Congress enacted the HEARTH Act, which passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, as an amendment to the Indian Long-Term Leasing Act of 1955 to promote tribal self-determination. For more information and a list of tribes with HEARTH Act leasing regulations approved prior to today's announcement, visit the Indian Affairs HEARTH Act web page.

*The **Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs** advises the Secretary of the Interior on Indian Affairs policy issues, communicates policy to and oversees the programs of the BIA and the BIE, provides leadership in consultations with tribes, and serves as the DOI official for intra- and inter-departmental coordination and liaison within the Executive Branch on Indian matters.*

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