Sweeney would be the first Alaska Native to hold the position

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WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke applauded President Donald J. Trump's nomination of Tara Mac Lean Sweeney, a prominent Alaska Native leader and acclaimed businesswoman with the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, to be the department's next Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs.

If confirmed by the U.S. Senate, Sweeney, a member of the Native Village of Barrow and the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope, would be the first Native Alaskan and only the second woman in history to hold the position.

The Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs oversees Interior's manifold responsibilities to enhance the quality of life, promote economic opportunity and provide quality educational opportunities for American Indians, Indian tribes and Alaska Natives, while protecting and improving their trust assets.

"Tara is a results-driven team leader and coalition builder who has an impressive combination of business acumen and service to her community," **Secretary Zinke said.** "Her lifelong active engagement in Native American policy development and her outreach, advocacy, and organization skills are the combination we need to carry out the President's reform initiative for Indian Country. I look forward to welcoming her to our leadership team."

"I am honored to be nominated to serve Indian Country in this capacity," **Tara Sweeney said.** "My goal is to develop strong relationships with Tribes, Alaska Native corporations and Native Hawaiian Organizations to work on innovative solutions for lifting up our communities. I am motivated to work with Indian Country to find efficiencies inside the Bureau of Indian Affairs, improve service delivery and culturally relevant curriculum in the Bureau of Indian Education, and create a more effective voice for Tribes throughout the Federal Government. I am humbled by the confidence President Trump and Secretary Zinke have shown in me and ready to serve."

"Secretary Zinke's nomination of Tara Sweeny for Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs taps a strong advocate for Native American self-determination and tribal self-government for this key leadership position," **said Acting Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs John Tahsuda**. "Her extensive organizational knowledge and collaborative management experience will well serve Indian Country by reforming federal policies, empowering tribal communities, and removing barriers to their economic advancement."

Sweeney grew up in rural Alaska and has spent a lifetime actively engaged in state and national policy arenas focused on advocating for responsible Indian energy policy, rural broadband connectivity, Arctic growth and Native American self-determination. She has served her Arctic Slope Regional Corporation and its subsidiaries in a variety of capacities for nearly two decades. The $2.6 billion corporation is the largest locally-owned and operated business in Alaska, with about 13,000 Iñupiat Eskimo members and

12,000 employees worldwide. It is diversified in six major business sectors, including energy support services, industrial services, construction, petroleum refining and marketing, government services, and resource development.

In her current role as the Executive Vice President of External Affairs, she is responsible for all facets of government affairs and corporate communications. Her primary responsibilities include strategic policy and position development, implementation and execution; engagement with federal and state executive and legislative branches on improving policies affecting Indian energy, taxation, resource development, government contracting, broadband development and access to capital; as well as all facets of corporate communication as official company spokesperson, including stakeholder engagement and coalition building.

Sweeney also has served in leadership positions on numerous business and nonprofit boards at both the state and national level, including chair of the Arctic Economic Council from 2015 to 2017; co-chair of the Alaska Federation of Natives (2013); Coast Guard Foundation Board of Trustees; the University of Alaska Foundation Board of Trustees; FCC Advisory Committee on Diversity for Communications in a Digital Age; Analytical Services, Inc.; Kohanic Broadcast Corporation (parent to the first Native American owned, publicly supported FM radio station); Cherokee Nation New Market Tax Credit Advisory Board (CNB Economic Development Company, LLC, beneficiary); Breast Cancer Focus, Inc.; and Arctic Power.

“I extend my congratulations and full support to Tara on her nomination to serve as Assistant Secretary,” **Senator Lisa Murkowski said**. “Tara has a very strong record of professionalism and accomplishment in Alaska, across the country, and internationally, especially with the indigenous people of the circumpolar north. She has significant experience on Arctic issues and chaired the Arctic Economic Council. She is an expert on energy, infrastructure, broadband, economic development, Native self-determination, and a wide range of policy issues that will come before her. Secretary Zinke could not have chosen a better leader to help him fulfill the federal government’s trust responsibility, and I know Tara has the heart and drive to excel in this position.”

“This is a historic appointment for Alaskans and for the country,” **Senator Dan Sullivan said**. “I’ve worked with Tara Sweeney for years and I have witnessed first-hand her integrity, her strong leadership skills and her devotion to public service. Tara has a deep love for our state and people, and is relentless in her commitment to securing a better future for Alaska and the nation. With her long history of advocating for Alaska Native cultural values, rights, and economic opportunity, I can’t think of anyone better to have as our nation’s next Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs.”

“This is an absolutely outstanding choice,” **said Congressman Don Young**.“Tara’s knowledge, experience and leadership will go a long way in straightening out the BIA, allowing it to run more efficiently for the good of all First Americans. She has extensive experience not only in business, but also within Alaska Native groups and organizations. Tara knows first-hand the fight for Native empowerment and self-determination because she’s been on the front lines for years. There’s long been a problem with Native issues not receiving the priority they deserve but with Tara Sweeney at the helm, I have no doubt the Department of Interior will be paying close attention and the voices of our Native communities will be heard. Tara follows in great Alaskan footsteps, those of my dear friend Morris Thompson, and will do a fantastic job working on behalf of American Indians and Alaska Natives across the country.”

“Tara’s selection for this position is cause for celebration in Alaska. In each of my conversations with Secretary Zinke, I have encouraged him to include Alaskans for significant roles in his department,” said Governor Walker. “Tara’s leadership in seeking self-determination and economic development for the people of the Arctic has been exemplary. As an Inupiaq tribal and corporate leader, she has sought the necessary balance between economic development and sustaining the ways of life and cultures of Alaska’s First People. While many will be sad to see her leave ASRC, Tara’s expertise will serve our state and nation well in this new role.”

"I commend the Secretary for his choice of Tara Sweeney for the Position of Assistant Secretary," **said Jackie Johnson Pata with the National Congress of American Indians**. "Tara's diverse experience in the areas of energy, natural resources, and tribal governance will be a welcome addition to the Department of Interior and NCAI looks forward to working with Tara in her new capacity."

“Since March when he was sworn in, Secretary Zinke has been assembling a top-notch team of professionals to help him lead the Interior Department,” said **John Berrey, Chairman of the Quapaw Tribe in Oklahoma**. “With Tara Sweeney’s nomination, the Secretary is showing he means business when it comes to reforming the BIA and improving the delivery of services to Indian people. Tara’s long and dedicated service to the Alaska Federation of Natives, the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation and, most recently, the Arctic Economic Council, will be what is needed in the BIA’s top official. I thank the secretary for this nomination and pledge to help Tara achieve success for Native people any way I can.”

“Ms. Sweeney’s background consists of the right elements to assist our economic development efforts with the tribes we serve in Montana, Wyoming, North and South Dakota towards economic sustainability,” **said Leonard Smith, Executive Director of the Native American Development Corporation**. “Her experience in energy, capital, government contracting and economic development give her the depth of knowledge to develop legislative solutions to federal policies that hinder economic development with tribal nations. We feel confident she will be able to promote stronger federal support through collaboration with other federal, state and private resources for implementation of the infrastructure necessary for economic growth and sustainability.”

“In these critical times, Ms. Tara Sweeney will serve as a strong Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs,” **said Julie Kitka, President of the Alaska Federation of Natives**. “Her experience with empowering Native Americans is unparalleled and she will help all tribes achieve great self-determination. There is not a Tribe or Alaska Native corporation that she would not help. I have had the opportunity to work alongside Ms. Sweeney for over a decade, I’ve seen her in action and she is driven by results.”

"Ms Sweeney is an incredibly qualified nominee," said Robin Puanani Danner, the Policy Chair for the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement. "Her business experience, the cultural grounding of her Inuit people, and her keen understanding of living in some of the most remote Native areas in the country will serve all first peoples in her role at the department of interior."

“Tara is a dedicated, hard-working and fearless leader focused on providing value and real results across local, national and international boundaries,” **said Gabriel Kompkoff, President of the ANCSA Regional Association, the membership association of Alaska Native Regional Corporation CEOs**. “Her passion shows through in every challenge she faces.”

Among her honors, Sweeney -- a lifetime member of the National Congress of American Indians -- was crowned Miss NCAI in 1993 and traveled the country as an ambassador for the organization. In 2003, Governor Frank Murkowski recognized Sweeney’s passion for rural Alaska, appointing her to his

cabinet as Special Assistant for Rural Affairs and Education. In 2008 she was honored as a “Top Forty Under 40″ business leader by the Alaska Journal of Commerce. In 2014 her team was honored by the Northwest Regional Emmy® Awards, for its IAM IÑUPIAQ commercial campaign 2014, and also served as co-chair for Senator Dan Sullivan’s (R-AK) successful Senate campaign. In 2017 she was inducted into the Anchorage ATHENA Society, a program of the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce that encourages the potential of women as valued members and leaders of the business community.

Born to Dr. Bryan Mac Lean and the Late Representative Eileen Panigeo Mac Lean, Sweeney is the granddaughter of the Late May Ahmaogak Panigeo and the Late Henry Panigeo of Barrow. She is the great granddaughter of the Late Bert and Nellie Panigeo and Isabel and Dr. Roy Ahmaogak. She was raised, attended schools and lived most of her life in rural Alaska in villages from Noorvik to Wainwright, Barrow, Bethel, and Unalakleet. She graduated from Barrow High School in 1991. A 1998 graduate of Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations with a Bachelor of Science Degree, Sweeney currently lives in Anchorage with her husband Kevin, and their two children, Caitlin and Ahmaogak.

Through its Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), Interior provides services (directly or through contracts, grants or compacts) to 1.9 million American Indians and Alaska Natives. There are 567 federally recognized American Indian tribes and Alaska Native corporations in the United States. The BIE provides education services to about 42,000 Indian students. The Indian trust, co-managed by BIA and the Office of the Special Trustee, consists of 55 million surface acres and 57 million acres of subsurface mineral estate. More than 11 million acres belong to individual Indians and nearly 44 million acres are held in trust for Indian tribes. On these lands, the Department manages more than 122,817 revenue-producing leases. In conjunction with the Department of the Treasury, Interior, also manages about $4.9 billion in Indian trust funds. In Fiscal Year 2016, $1.2 billion was received into and disbursed from tribal and individual Indian beneficiaries’ accounts.

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