Seeks tribal nominations for educational fund's Board of Trustees

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WASHINGTON D.C. – Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced that the American Indian College Fund has been selected to administer the student Scholarship Fund authorized by the Cobell Settlement, with a fifth of the annual scholarships to be awarded by the American Indian Graduate Center. Secretary Salazar is also seeking nominations for two of the members who will serve on the Board of Trustees that oversees the educational fund.

"This Scholarship Fund for Native American students will be a lasting, meaningful legacy of the Cobell Settlement that will help strengthen Indian communities, advance tribal progress and secure a better future for the First Americans," Salazar said. "In selecting these qualified organizations and in seeking the best trustees to oversee this educational fund, we are honoring Elouise Cobell and helping to empower Indian Country."

"My mother, Elouise Cobell, cared deeply about the next generation of Native people and she insisted on this scholarship as part of the settlement," said Turk Cobell. "It is a fitting tribute to her courageous work and will be a longstanding and appropriate legacy of her extraordinary perseverance and vision."

"The Cobell Settlement scholarship fund will help students across Indian Country receive a higher education, whether it's through college, graduate school, or vocational certifications," said Interior Solicitor Hilary Tompkins. "The fund administrator will play an important role in providing American Indians and Alaska Native students with the post-secondary training and education they need to succeed in today's world, whether in the workplace, in the community or in government."

Salazar named the non-profit fund administrator after receiving nominations from the Lead Plaintiff and evaluating the candidates through a high-level Selection Committee that included Interior policy appointees from Indian Affairs, the Office of the Solicitor and the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget.

On the Selection Committee's recommendation, Salazar chose the American Indian College Fund to be the Recipient Organization, stipulating that the funds it receives be devoted to scholarships for vocational certifications and 4-year accredited bachelor degree colleges and universities, including tribal colleges that provide these degrees. The Secretary also stipulated that 20 percent of annual scholarships be awarded by the American Indian Graduate Center to encourage Native American college graduates to strive for professional and doctoral degrees.

"We are honored to have been selected to administer the largest scholarship fund ever established on behalf American Indian and Alaska Native students," said Dr. Cheryl Crazy Bull, President and CEO of the American Indian College Fund. "I look forward to working with the American Indian Graduate

Center to provide greater opportunities for higher education to the next generation of Indian leaders and professionals."

The American Indian College Fund, headquartered in Denver, has extensive experience in providing students the resources to succeed in tribal colleges and technical and vocational certifications as well as traditional undergraduate and graduate programs. The American Indian Graduate Center (Albuquerque) is renowned for its award of scholarships to graduate students.

The Secretary and Lead Plaintiff will each select two members for the Board of Trustees that will oversee the Scholarship Fund. As the Recipient Organization, the American Indian College Fund, will select one member. The Claims Resolution Act of 2010 requires the Secretary to choose his members after consulting with federally recognized Indian tribes and considering the candidates they nominate.

Tribal nominations for the Secretary's trustees must be postmarked or emailed no later than Thursday, April 11, 2013. Please send curriculum vitae, a letter of intent which indicates a willingness to serve, and a 250-word statement which supports the candidacy to Lizzie Marsters, Chief of Staff to the Deputy Secretary, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street NW, Room 6118, Washington, DC 20240. The $3.4 billion Cobell Settlement authorized a $1.9 billion Land 'Buy-Back' Program that will purchase small, multiple interests from willing sellers at fair market value. The acquired interests remain in trust or restricted status through transfer to tribal governments, enabling them to use the consolidated parcels for the benefit of their communities. As an incentive to participate in the land consolidation program, a donation will be made to the Scholarship Fund for each fractional interest purchased by the 'Buy-Back' Program. Interior is authorized to set aside up to $60 million for the Scholarship Fund from the purchase of these fractional interests.

Click HERE for a Fact Sheet on the Scholarship Fund and Board of Trustees.

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