--Deploys Senior Leadership Officials to North Dakota to Assess Situation--

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Acting Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Donald E. "Del" Laverdure today announced that, in addition to ongoing efforts by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to address reported child safety and protection deficiencies at the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe in North Dakota, he is sending in a strike team of senior BIA officials from its Central Office to assess and evaluate efforts to improve the Tribe's social services program. The decision to deploy senior officials to the region came at the urging of U.S. Senator Kent Conrad.

"In light of the continuing need to improve child safety and protection on the Spirit Lake Reservation, I have directed the Bureau of Indian Affairs to send in a 'strike team' of senior leadership officials who will conduct an in-depth assessment and evaluation of the ongoing efforts to assist the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe with improving its social services program," Laverdure said. "While the BIA has been working closely with the Tribe and other stakeholders on this for several months, I feel it is incumbent upon me as the acting Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs to bring additional resources to bear on this critical matter for the people of Spirit Lake."

Senior leadership officials being deployed include BIA Director Mike Black, Office of Indian Services (OIS) Deputy Bureau Director Hankie Ortiz, OIS Social Services Chief Sue Settles, and Office of Justice Services (OJS) Deputy Bureau Director Darren Cruzan.

The BIA OIS has been working with the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe since August 2011 to help it improve and strengthen its child safety and program compliance while respecting the Tribe's inherent right of self-governance. The Tribe has administered the social services program under a Public Law 93-638 contract with the BIA since 2001.

In August 2011, the BIA's Great Plains Regional Office's (GPRO) Division of Human Services in Aberdeen, S.D., conducted its regular annual review of the program and found serious deficiencies in contract performance, including failing to follow regulations, a lack of documentation for critical child safety activities, and improper expenditures. A corrective action plan was issued and the Tribe has been working on addressing these deficiencies, with an intensive focus on critical child safety activities, with the BIA, the State of North Dakota Department of Human Services and the Indian Health Service (IHS).

Since the initial corrective action plan was issued by the BIA to the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribal Social Services program in November 2011, with a more detailed plan issued on April 23, 2012, the Bureau has provided financial, training, and technical assistance resources to the program.

In April 2012, the BIA provided one-time funding for a temporary social services worker to help the Tribe with addressing the deficiencies cited in its corrective action plan. Since then, the Bureau has

detailed social workers from its Rosebud and Standing Rock Agencies in South Dakota and Rocky Mountain Regional Office in Billings, Mont., to Spirit Lake to work with the tribal social services program and oversee its efforts to improve compliance and reporting. It also has provided funding to the tribe for an additional Child Protection Worker as well as to the GPRO to hire another Child Welfare Specialist to provide intensive support to the tribes in the Great Plains Region, particularly the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe.

The BIA also has worked cooperatively, and continues to do so, with the Tribe and other stakeholders to ensure the program is gaining access to federal and state resources, and to provide the Tribe with additional assistance to help it address jurisdictional issues and training needs. For example, it formed a supportive coalition of stakeholders that includes the Spirit Lake Tribal Social Services program, the BIA Central Office, GPRO and Fort Totten (N.D.) Agency, the IHS, the North Dakota Department of Human Services, Ramsey County Social Services, Benson County Social Services, and state and local law enforcement.

It also has been working with the IHS to develop a tracking and coding system for suspected child abuse and neglect reports and to ensure that children under the tribal social services program can access the full range of IHS services. In addition, the GPRO has been and continues to monitor the program as it works on correcting deficiencies while coordinating BIA personnel and resources to support the Tribe's efforts at improvement.

With the assistance of the BIA and other stakeholders, the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe Social Services program has made progress in the areas where it was deficient, and the BIA will continue to provide technical assistance, staffing and training to the program for the foreseeable future and as resources allow. Future efforts include:

• A follow-up program review by the GPRO during the week of September 10, 2012,

• Recruiting BIA social workers to assist with on-site monitoring and technical assistance for up to one year contingent on funding,

• Coordinating with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) on resources for the Tribe,

• Working with IHS on training for mandatory reporters,

• Establishing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe, the BIA and law enforcement to complete National Crime Investigation Center federal background checks for each foster care placement, and

• Sending tribal social service child protection workers to the University of North Dakota for Child Welfare Certification training next month.

The Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs oversees the BIA, which is headed by a director who is responsible for managing day-to-day operations through four offices – Indian Services, Justice Services, Trust Services and Field Operations – that administer or fund tribally based infrastructure, law enforcement, social services, tribal governance, natural and energy resources and trust management programs for the nation's federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages through 12 regional offices and 85 agencies.

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