Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON -- Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today praised President Obama's signing of the Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Homeownership Act (HEARTH Act) which grants greater authority to federally recognized tribes to develop and implement their own regulations for leasing on Indian lands. The Act passed the House and Senate with overwhelming bipartisan support and was signed into law today by President Obama.

"The HEARTH Act underscores President Obama's commitment to empower Indian nations and strengthen their economies by expanding opportunities for tribal governments," said Secretary Salazar. "This legislation complements the work we are doing at Interior to undertake the most comprehensive reforms of Indian land leasing regulations in more than 50 years. These parallel efforts will have a real impact for individuals and families who want to own a home or build a business – generating investment, new jobs and revenues."

Under the HEARTH Act, federally recognized tribes can develop and implement their own land leasing regulations. Upon approval of these tribal regulations by the Secretary of the Interior, tribes will have the authority to process land leases without Bureau of Indian Affairs approval. This new authority has the potential to significantly reduce the time it takes to approve leases for homes and small businesses in Indian Country.

"The HEARTH Act has been a legislative priority for Interior because it advances the authority and ability of federally-recognized tribes to control their homelands and provides them greater self-determination," said Acting Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Donald E. "Del" Laverdure. "We are moving forward to finalize our internal reforms at Indian Affairs that will bring greater transparency, efficiency and workability to the Bureau of Indian Affairs approval process."

In 2011, Salazar announced a sweeping reform of federal surface leasing regulations for American Indian lands that will streamline the approval process for home ownership, expedite economic development and spur renewable energy development in Indian Country.

The proposed rule would modify regulations governing the Bureau of Indian Affairs' process for approving the lease of surface acres on lands the federal government holds in trust for tribes and individuals. As trustee, Interior is responsible for managing approximately 56 million surface acres in Indian Country.

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