Secretary Salazar Commends Echo Hawk for his leadership, service

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WASHINGTON – Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced today that Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk will be leaving the Department of the Interior after nearly 3 years of leadership. Echo Hawk, an enrolled member of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, will resign his position effective April 27, 2012 to assume a leadership position in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“Larry has done an extraordinary job at Interior, opening a new chapter in our nation-to-nation relationship with American Indian and Alaska Natives tribal governments and carrying out President Obama’s vision for empowering Indian nations,” Salazar said. “During his tenure, the Department accelerated the restoration of tribal homelands, improved public safety in tribal communities, resolved century-old water disputes, made critical investments in education, and reached many more milestones that are helping Indian nations pursue the future of their choosing. We thank Larry for his exemplary leadership and wish him all the best as he begins a new chapter in his life.”

“The opportunity to participate in remedying the negative perceptions of the federal government in Indian Country was a formidable challenge at first, but I am proud to say that I have served my country as an agent for change here in Indian Affairs,” said Echo Hawk. “I believe at the end of this Administration, the work we accomplished will leave a lasting legacy for American Indian and Alaska Natives. I want to thank President Obama, Secretary Salazar, the American Indian and Alaska Native tribal nations and the many devoted employees at Interior who supported my leadership and allowed me the opportunity to serve Indian Country.”

Donald “Del” Laverdure, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs, will serve as Acting Assistant Secretary until President Obama nominates a new Assistant Secretary to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate. Laverdure is a member of the Crow Nation and has served in a leadership role at Interior since 2009.

“Del has played a key role in many of Interior’s meaningful accomplishments over the past three years, and I am confident that he is the right person to lead Indian Affairs as we continue to fulfill President Obama’s vision for reconciliation and empowerment for Indian nations,” Salazar added.

Under Echo Hawk’s leadership, Interior has reenergized its commitment to fulfilling this nation’s trust responsibilities to Native Americans. The Department has broken the logjam on trust land applications and streamlined the process as part of the most substantial overhaul of the Department’s leasing process in 50 years. Since 2009, the Department has acquired more than 158,000 acres of land in trust on behalf of tribal nations.

Interior is also working to implement the landmark Claims Resolution Act of 2010 that included the Cobell Settlement, a $3.4 billion settlement that honorably and responsibly addresses long-standing injustices.

Echo Hawk has worked to meet the critical water needs of Native American communities, helping to reach historic water rights settlements that offer a fair resolution to decades of conflict and litigation. For communities, like the Taos Pueblo and Aamodt case pueblos in New Mexico; the Crow Tribe of Montana and the White Mountain Apache Tribe in Arizona, the permanent water supply will vastly improve the quality of life and offer greater economic security.

During his tenure, Echo Hawk worked across the federal government, including the Department of Justice, to help build safer communities and implement the Tribal Law and Order Act that President Obama signed into law in 2010. Echo Hawk strengthened law enforcement and launched an intense community policing pilot program on four reservations experiencing high crime rates. The Safe Indian Communities initiative, a two-year program, has so far achieved a 35 percent overall decrease in violent crime across the four communities.

Echo Hawk has also led the way in drafting a comprehensive and transparent consultation policy for the Department that will provide a strong, meaningful role for tribal governments at all stages of federal decision-making on Indian policy.

President Obama nominated Echo Hawk on April 20, 2009 and the Senate confirmed him as the Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs on May 19, 2009. He was sworn into office by Secretary Salazar on May 22, 2009.

Echo Hawk was elected Attorney General of Idaho in 1990, the first American Indian in U.S. history to achieve that distinction. He also served two consecutive terms in the Idaho House of Representatives, from 1982 to 1986. A former U.S. Marine, Echo Hawk began his law career as a legal services attorney working for impoverished Indian people in California, then opened a private law office in Salt Lake City. He also served as the Chief General Legal Counsel for the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation in Idaho from 1977-1986.

Echo Hawk received his Juris Doctor degree from the University of Utah in 1973; and attended Stanford Graduate School of Business's MBA Program, 1974-1975. Echo Hawk, 63, and his wife Terry have six children and 24 grandchildren.

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