Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk was awarded the 2012 Governmental Leadership Award from the National Congress of American Indians for his leadership on behalf of the tribal nations and his work building the foundation for a new era in nation-to-nation relations.

“I am very humbled and honored to receive this prestigious award,” said Assistant Secretary Echo Hawk. “The work we do at Indian Affairs is a rewarding experience in and of itself. It reminds me daily of my civic duty and loyalty towards my tribe, my people, my heritage, Indian Country and America. It also gives me great pleasure to see our youth doing great things in the classroom and being recognized for their tremendous efforts.”

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) held its 14th Annual Leadership Awards Ceremony on March 6, 2012.

The NCAI also honored the Bureau of Indian Education’s Wingate High School, N.M. team for its 2011-2012 Tribal Exchange competition. As part of a Bureau of Indian Education program to develop financial skills, the Wingate team built a mock stock portfolio. Their mock investments made $14,000 in eight weeks. The Wingate High School team receiving the award included Nigel Nakai, Kayla Platero, Alicia Billey, Frances Shorty and their Advisor Bruce Lewis.

The program aims at building the financial management skills that future Tribal officials will need to lead their nations in today’s increasingly complex global economy. Despite America’s diverse financial sector, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation noted that 44.5 percent of Native people are unbanked or underbanked - almost double the national rate. The U.S. Treasury Department reported in 2001 that 86 percent of tribal lands lacked a single financial institution, including a simple ATM.

In 2008, the NCAI launched a partnership with the Stock Market Game to develop the Tribal Exchange competition. The Exchange teaches valuable financial life skills and team building while facilitating inter-tribal connections for American Indian and Alaska Native students. The program is funded through a grant from the Bureau of Indian Education, which allows students attending BIE schools to participate in the program for free. More than 1,500 students have participated since the program’s inception.

“The awards given tonight acknowledge the tremendous efforts and attitudes we appreciate across Indian Country," said Jefferson Keel, the President of NCAI. “We need leadership that understands our needs so that Indian Country becomes stronger in years to come, leaders who are willing to devote a commitment to a more prosperous tomorrow—the honorees tonight all possess these needed attitudes.”

The Tribal Exchange is a 10-week program that runs through the fall semester and is open to Native students in grades four through twelve. Students are organized in teams of school clubs or classes. Teams are generally comprised of three to five students to ensure that all students play an important role in the decision-making processes of the game. Each team is given $100,000 in game money to

invest in a stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. The game rules specify that each team must have at least two stocks and one bond or mutual fund in their portfolio to be eligible. The team that increases the value of the investment most by the end of the game period wins.

The Bureau of Indian Education has partnered with NCAI for the last three years to provide students with an experience of building a stock portfolio without being on Wall Street.

The Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs discharges the duties of the Secretary of the Interior with the authority and direct responsibility to strengthen the government-to-government relationship with the nation's 566 federally recognized tribes, advocate policies that support Indian self-determination, protect and preserve Indian trust assets, and administer a wide array of laws, regulations and functions relating to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, tribal members and individual trust beneficiaries. The Assistant Secretary oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education. For more information, visit www.indianaffairs.gov.

The Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs oversees the BIE which implements federal education laws such as the No Child Left Behind Act throughout the BIE school system. The bureau also serves post secondary students through higher education scholarships and support funding to 26 tribal colleges and universities and two tribal technical colleges. It also directly operates two post secondary institutions: Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan., and the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque, N.M.

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