Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON – Internet access is being restored to the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) via the BIA's network following a recent court order. This means that Indian Affairs, BIA and BIE employees will soon be able to communicate by email with tribes, other federal offices and the general public to provide services and conduct business.

"I am extremely pleased that all Indian Affairs offices and bureaus will now be allowed to enter the 21st century and take their place among their federal peers on the Internet," said Assistant Secretary Carl J. Artman. "Reconnection will allow our employees to work more efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of tribes and their members."

On Dec. 5, 2001, the federal judge in a class action lawsuit against the Department of the Interior, Cobell v. Norton, entered a temporary restraining order requiring the Department to disconnect from the Internet all information technology systems that housed or provided access to individual Indian trust data, on the basis of perceived risks to that data. On Dec. 17, 2001, a Consent Order was entered which continued that prohibition and also established a process for the Department to obtain permission from the court to reconnect bureaus on a case-by-case basis.

Parts of the Department were permitted to reconnect in 2002. However, the five offices that work closely with Indian trust data remained off the Internet. On May 14, 2008, U.S. District Judge James Robertson, the presiding judge in the case, vacated the Consent Order thus allowing those offices to reconnect. In addition to the BIA, the offices to go back online are the Office of the Solicitor, the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST), the Office of Hearing and Appeals (OHA) and the Office of Historical Trust Accounting (OHTA).

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs is responsible for fulfilling the Interior Department's trust responsibilities to individual Indian and tribal trust beneficiaries, as well as promoting tribal self-determination, self-governance and economic development for the nation's 562 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and their 1.9 million members.

The BIA administers and manages 66 million acres of land held in trust by the United States for American Indians, Alaska Natives and federally recognized tribes. Developing forestlands, leasing assets on trust lands, directing agricultural programs, protecting land and water rights, and developing and maintaining infrastructure and economic development on tribal lands are all part of the Bureau's responsibility.

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