Sets January 1 as New Deadline for Proposed Funding Formula

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(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – In remarks at the 2001 National Tribal Roads Conference held last week in Albuquerque, N.M, Interior Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Neal A. McCaleb reaffirmed the authority of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century Negotiated Rulemaking Committee, otherwise known as the TEA-21 Negotiated Rulemaking Committee, to develop proposed regulations and a new funding formula for the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Indian Reservation Roads Program, while acceding to the committee's request for more time to complete its work.

"I listened, empowered the committee, and responded to their proposal for additional time to mold a single formula," McCaleb said upon extending the deadline to January 1, 2002.

The TEA-21 Negotiated Rulemaking Committee, which is comprised of 29 tribal members and 11 Federal members from the Department of the Interior and the Department of Transportation, had been working under an October 30, 2001, deadline.

The proposed regulations and funding formula are the result of meetings the committee held from March, 1999, through December, 2000. However, committee members could only narrow their conclusions to two different formulae. In order to break the impasse, McCaleb, at a meeting with the committee's tribal co-chairs on October 10, 2001, announced his intent to propose a single funding formula that addressed the Act's requirements and included concepts from the two formulae. At the same time, he informed committee members that they could submit another proposed single formula for his consideration by October 30. After deciding on which funding formula to propose, he said, he would then forward the proposed rule to the Federal Register for publication.

Before an estimated audience of 300 that included over 25 tribal leaders, McCaleb, a former Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation, presented his overall views on Indian transportation issues and spoke of developing comprehensive transportation strategies in an effort to begin a consultation process geared towards having both the BIA and tribal governments address common goals of funding and program improvements for Indian Country.

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs, a 176-year-old federal agency with approximately 10,000 employees nationwide that provides services to, carries out its federal trust responsibilities for, and promotes the self-determination of the 558 federally recognized tribal governments and approximately 1.4 million American Indians and Alaska Natives. Under his purview are a 185-school system, one of only two federally administered school systems in the country; 29 tribally controlled colleges; law enforcement and detention programs and facilities; transportation, social service, firefighting, tribal economic development and Indian child welfare programs; trust resource management programs, including management of tribal and individual Indian trust assets; and the federal acknowledgement process.