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(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Neal A. McCaleb today announced the appointment of Robert D. Ecoffey, a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe of South Dakota, as its lead law enforcement officer. As director of the Bureau's Office of Law Enforcement Services, Ecoffey will oversee a 750-person department that provides uniformed police services, detention operations and criminal investigations of alleged or suspected violations of major federal criminal laws in Indian Country.

"BIA law enforcement is in very capable hands," said McCaleb "Robert Ecoffey has the knowledge and expertise in federal law enforcement required for working with tribes across the United States."

Ecoffey will be responsible for all headquarter and field activities associated with the direction, coordination, support and operation of BIA law enforcement programs. "I am honored to have been selected," said Ecoffey. "I look forward to the challenge of making our Indian reservations a safer place to live. It is important that we work hand-in-hand with tribal communities to achieve this goal, and I will work with them every step of the way."

Ecoffey comes to the position with over 25 years of experience in the federal government, 18 of which spent in law enforcement. In 1983, he became the first American Indian to serve as a U.S. Marshall in the 204-year history of the Service. Ecoffey's priorities for his tenure are curbing drug abuse, developing greater cooperation between tribal and Bureau law enforcement agencies, involving Indian communities at the initial stages of policy development, and increasing the number of tribal and BIA law enforcement officers to meet growing public safety needs in Indian Country. To facilitate the latter, he feels that the success of future recruitment efforts to bring more young Indian men and women into the Bureau's law enforcement ranks will depend on partnerships between the tribes, K-12 schools and tribal colleges to generate interest in choosing law enforcement as a career. In addition, he is also looking at providing educational grants to Indian students in exchange for years of service in law enforcement and the creation of an Indian Youth Police Academy for 16-19 year-olds, which is already taking shape with two sessions scheduled for the summer of 2002. Prior to his appointment as director of OLES, Ecoffey served as superintendent of the Bureau's Pine Ridge Agency on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota for the past five years. During his time there, Ecoffey working closely with the Oglala Sioux Tribe in a successful effort to have the reservation designated as an empowerment zone under the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He is particularly proud that he was instrumental in helping the Sueann Big Crow Boys and Girls Club, an affiliate of the National Boys and Girls Club of America, plan and build a new $6 million facility on the Pine Ridge reservation, which is slated for completion in June 2002.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, an agency with almost 10,000 employees nationwide, 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. Through the Office of Law Enforcement Services, the Bureau directly operates 49 and funds 160 tribally operated law enforcement programs across the country which combined provide Indian Country with nearly 2,100 law enforcement personnel including law enforcement and detention officers. OLES

personnel work cooperatively with other federal law enforcement agencies to provide protection to persons and property and to enforce federal laws on federal Indian reservations.

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