“It is important for Indian people, no matter where we live and work, to know what’s going on in our communities and the larger world.

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: August 31, 2001
Print PDF

(TULSA, Okla.) – Interior Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Neal A. McCaleb was named last night as the 2001 Native American Newsmaker of the Year by the Native American Times, Oklahoma’s largest Indian-owned newspaper. McCaleb received the newsmaker award during the Oklahoma Native American Business Development Center awards banquet at the Gilcrease Museum here. The center holds the annual awards ceremony to recognize individuals and companies from the Oklahoma Indian business community.

McCaleb, a member of the Chickasaw Nation and a native of Oklahoma City who used to own an engineering business, stressed in his remarks that, “strong, healthy tribal economies are a vital part of Oklahoma and the nation. They are the fuel in the economic engine that drives our country towards the future.” The Assistant Secretary also said he, “looked forward to a candid dialogue with you and others on how the BIA can effectively encourage the growth of Indian entrepreneurship and tribal enterprise.”

Speaking to an audience of several hundred state and local Indian business and political leaders, McCaleb said, “I am honored to receive this recognition by the Native American Times.” The weekly newspaper, which covers local and national news and events affecting the Oklahoma Indian community, has a circulation of 12,000 with subscribers in 47 states and three countries (see www.okit.com). “It is important for Indian people, no matter where we live and work, to know what’s going on in our communities and the larger world. Native news outlets such as the Times, who are also Indian businesses, not only meet our need for news and information, but help us maintain our cultural connections.”

McCaleb also had the honor of seeing two people he had mentored receive awards at the ceremony. “I’ve been privileged to watch these young men grow and achieve economic success,” he said. Frank Narcomey, a member of the Seminole Nation and President of Southwind Construction Co., Inc., of Edmond, Okla., received the ONABDC’s Native American Firm of the Year award and the Oklahoma American Indian Chamber of Commerce’s Business Award of the Year. Mark Farris, a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and President of Red Plains Professional, Inc., also of Edmond, received the Oklahoma Department of Transportation’s Native American Business of the Year Award. McCaleb proudly acknowledged these winners in his remarks saying, “it makes my soul sing and my heart soar like an eagle to see these two young Indian businessmen achieve success and recognition.”

Also among the evening’s honorees were Oklahoma State Senator Kelley Haney as the U.S. Department of Commerce Minority Business Development Agency’s Regional Leader of the Year, the Iowa Tribe’s BKJ Solutions as ONABDC Tribal Business of the Year, and other Chamber of Commerce and ODOT

award winners. The evening's keynote speaker was Menominee Tribal Chairman Apesanahkwat. McCaleb oversees the BIA, a 176-year-old federal agency with almost 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; 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.

Prior to his selection by President Bush as Assistant Secretary, McCaleb served as Secretary of Transportation as well as Director of the Oklahoma Transportation Authority and the Department of Transportation under Governor Frank Keating. He is the eighth Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs to be sworn in since Congress established the position in 1977. His appointment followed a professional life in Oklahoma where he enjoyed several careers including civil engineering, business, state government, politics and as a proponent of tribal self-determination through sustained, successful economic development.

In the 2000 Census, Oklahoma, which is home to 39 federally recognized tribes, ranked second behind California in total American Indian population. According to a 1997 Census report, the last year such data was available, the state ranked third behind California and Texas as having the largest number of American Indian- and Alaska Native-owned businesses.

--BIA--