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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Neal A. McCaleb, a member of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma and President Bush's nominee for Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior, was sworn into office July 4, 2001, on the occasion of America's 225th birthday. "I'm ready, willing and enthusiastic about starting in my new role," McCaleb said. Interior Secretary Gale Norton administered the oath of office at the Interior Department building in Washington, D.C., where McCaleb was surrounded by well-wishers including Chickasaw Nation Ambassador Charles Blackwell, who held the bible for the ceremony. The Senate had confirmed McCaleb's nomination on June 29.

"I was gratified and privileged today to be able to swear in Neal McCaleb as my Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs," said Secretary Norton. "I know he will do an outstanding job. I commend the Senate for confirming this important member of my leadership team, and I look forward to many more swearing-in ceremonies in the days and weeks ahead."

The event in Washington was an administrative swearing-in; an official public ceremony will take place in the coming weeks.

Following the ceremony, McCaleb announced his intent to focus on three immediate goals: to meet with tribal leaders on a one-to-one basis and, to the greatest extent possible, on their turf; to become involved with congressional activities that relate to American Indian and Alaska Native interests; and to rapidly develop a working knowledge of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the 176- year-old federal agency he will oversee, and its people and operations in order to be useful and responsive to the needs of the agency's customers. "The BIA, in all of its functions, is to be a service organization to the American Indian and Alaska Native people," McCaleb said. "In my view, I expect it to be an 'Indian Service.'"

Until his nomination by President Bush, McCaleb served as Oklahoma's first Secretary of Transportation in Governor Bellmon's Administration from 1987 to 1991, and recently in Governor Keating's Administration from 1995 to 2001, where he was responsible for overseeing the construction and maintenance of the state's transportation systems and the state-assisted general airports program. In 1999, then-Secretary McCaleb negotiated the reinstatement of passenger rail service to Oklahoma with Amtrak after a 20-year absence. He was also the first in the history of the state government to serve concurrently as Director of both the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (1987 to 1995) and the Oklahoma Transportation Authority, as well as serving as Cabinet Secretary. He served eight years in the Oklahoma House of Representatives and was elected Minority Floor Leader in 1978.

A native of Oklahoma City, Okla., McCaleb has been a practicing engineer with more than 40 years' experience in designing and supervising the construction of roads, bridges, public facilities and architectural structures in Oklahoma and throughout the Southwest. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from Oklahoma State University. He and his wife Georgann have four grown children.

McCaleb is the eighth Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs to be sworn in since Congress established the position in the late 1970s. 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.