Urges Responsible and Responsive Tribal Governments

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Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Kevin Gover spoke Thursday, March 19, about critical American Indian issues and his vision for Tribal America during a University of South Dakota School of Law symposium on "Indian Nations on the Eve of 21st Century: Sovereignty, Self-Government, Water Rights, Land Rights." The speech was taped by C-SPAN for later broadcast.

Gover was nominated by President Clinton for the Assistant Secretary's position and was sworn in on November 12, 1997. He leads the 10,700-employee Bureau of Indian Affairs and serves as the Clinton Administration's senior Indian Affairs official.

"I am urging the Tribes to recapture their warrior traditions and define the meaning of the warrior tradition in today's complex world," Gover said. "A warrior is not defined by violence and hostility, but by the commitment and sacrifice that transcends all personal interest." Gover also explored the theme of "Indian Warriors Then and Now" as it relates to the challenging work of tribal leaders, Indian lawyers, and others who work on behalf of 554 federally recognized tribal nations. His speech included a discussion of the devastating Indian Country problems that include alcohol and drug abuse, youth suicides, and joblessness. Gover emphasized that today's "warriors" must use their considerable skills and experience in creating tribal solutions to these troubling problems, while also strengthening responsible and responsive tribal governments.

"Over the past 30 years we have seen a dramatic rise in the acknowledgment of the Tribal power of self-government. That power is under attack, and some of those attacks are given credence when a tribe exercises its power irresponsibly," he said. "The great leaders and great warriors of the past thought less about the power of leadership and more about the responsibility of leadership. This is a tradition we have to learn to follow."

Gover also discussed the changing direction and improvement of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the many challenges that face it and tribal nations as the new century approaches.