Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Secretary Zinke hosts tribal round table to address opioid crisis

Media Contact: Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov
For Immediate Release: July 26, 2018
Print PDF

FARGO, ND - Today, U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke recognized Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) - Turtle Mountain Agency Law Enforcement Officers Stacey Larocque and Michael Slater and BIA-Standing Rock Agency Law Enforcement Officers Wayland Bad Hand and Gary Sandland with the Secretary's Commendation Award for their quick and heroic actions to save the lives of individuals who overdosed on deadly, synthetic opioid drugs.

"Officers Larocque, Slater, Bad Hand, and Sandland are heroes and role models for every one of the Department's 4,000 law enforcement officers," said Secretary Zinke. "Thanks to their quick actions and cool heads, they were able to save lives. I'm incredibly proud and honored to have them on our team."

"Teamwork and training saved lives," said Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs John Tahsuda. "Our officers are dedicated to protecting Indian Country every day. I applaud these officers for utilizing their training in an exceptional manner while under pressure to save tribal members from the deathly grips of their opioid overdose. They saved members of Indian Country's family."

"On behalf of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, we would like to commend Sergeant Stacy Larocque and Officer Michael Slater on receiving the letters of commendation and the pinning of the Life Saving Ribbons," said Chairman Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Jamie S. Azure. "Our community is proud of all of our law enforcement and grateful for all of our uniformed officers and emergency services who knowingly put their lives on the line to protect others in the line of duty."

Officer Slater arrived at the home on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in New Town, ND, and found a man unconscious and with no pulse. The family at the scene alerted Officer Slater about the suspected overdose. Officer Slater administered CPR until Officer Larocque arrived to administer Naloxone, commonly referred to as Narcan. The man gained consciousness after three doses and within minutes was responsive to the first responders.

The Secretary recognized Sergeant Larocque and Officer Slater during a roundtable meeting with North Dakota's five Tribes. The conversation focused on issues each tribe faces with the opioid crisis and included options and opportunities to help the communities.

Officer Bad Hand responded to a reported assault of a female on the Standing Rock Reservation. Upon arriving at a residence, Officer Bad Hand found the unresponsive woman exhibiting signs of an opioid overdose. Officer Gary Sandland arrived at the scene and retrieved the Narcan, a dose in the form of a nasal spray, from the Officer Bad Hand's patrol car. The woman regained consciousness after the medication was administered by Officer Bad Hand. Officer Sandland continued to assist by holding the IV bag of Narcan that the responding Standing Rock EMS had inserted in the distressed woman's arm.

The Secretary's recognition of Officers Larocque, Slater, Bad Hand, and Sandland was followed by a roundtable meeting with the Tribes from North Dakota – Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, Spirit Lake, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, The Three Affiliated Tribes, and Turtle Mountain of Chippewa. The conversation focused on issues each Tribe faces with the opioid crisis and included options and opportunities to help the communities.

"President Trump has made it clear that ending the opioid crisis is a top priority, and I'm honored to have the government-to-government relationship with North Dakota's tribal nations," **said Secretary Zinke**. "For too many, opioids have torn the fabric of the community apart, leaving children orphaned or in dangerous situations. Under President Trump's leadership, the federal government is partnering with tribes to identify and prioritize community-based recovery solutions. This would both help victims return to health and also keep our children safe and close to home."

"This Round Table has provided another opportunity to advance the essential dialogue that includes Tribal communities in the national opioid crisis," said **Chairwoman Myra Pearson of the Spirit Lake Tribe.** "The opioid epidemic is another silent threat to our families and it is one that all tribal communities should all be aware of. Proper storage and disposal of medication are effective ways to protect against potential abuse. I encourage everyone to learn to identify the signs of opioid abuse, the signs of an opioid overdose and how to respond to an overdose until trained first responders arrive. Together, we can help save lives."

"I extend my deepest gratitude to Secretary Zinke for spotlighting this important issue and meeting with the North Dakota tribal leaders," **said Chairman Mark Fox of the Three Affiliated Tribes**. "For the health and wellness of Indian Country, we must continue to work together on developing and implementing strategies to overcome the threats posed by the nationwide opioid crisis. I am committed to continuing the open dialogue started at the Round Table with the Administration to stop the encroachment of this epidemic in its tracks."

Earlier in the year, Secretary Zinke established the first of its kind law enforcement Joint Task Force (JTF) on opioids. The JTF brings together officers from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, state and local law enforcement, and Tribal law enforcement. The JTF conducts investigations and sting operations on Reservations at the request of Tribal leadership.

At the beginning of the year, Secretary Zinke held a series of tribal community visits on the Opioid Crisis in Indian Country — Tohono O'odham, Gila River, Salt River, and AK-Chin in Arizona; Oneida in Wisconsin; Spokane, Colville, and Lummi Nations in Washington State. The Interior's Joint Task Force was established by Secretary Zinke to help achieve President Donald Trump's mission to end the opioid epidemic. The Secretary has publicly praised operations led by the new Interior Joint Task Force that resulted in the seizure of $2.5 Million worth of Meth and $22,000 in Marijuana, Heroin and Other Narcotics near Pueblo lands in New Mexico; and a opioid bust around tribal lands in Arizona that seized 9,050 Fentanyl pills, 48.2 pounds of methamphetamine, 1.2 pounds of heroin, 863 pounds of marijuana, one-half pound of cocaine, and $30,000 in cash.

A Memorandum of Agreement between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service supports training for BIA Law Enforcement in administering Narcan, a naloxone nasal spray. Officer Jonathan Vigil was the first BIA Officer to successfully use Narcan while on duty on August 2, 2016.

For Immediate Release: July 26, 2018

