Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell today announced that Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Kevin K. Washburn, after more than three years of leadership, will conclude his service to the Department and will return to the faculty of the University of New Mexico School of Law in January. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Lawrence "Larry" Roberts will lead Indian Affairs for the remainder of the Obama Administration.

"Kevin is a tireless change agent for Indian Country and true partner in our efforts to chart a brighter future for tribal communities through self-determination and self-governance," Secretary Jewell said. "He is a thoughtful leader who provided a steady hand to modernize Indian Affairs to better serve tribes, which will be felt by generations to come in tribal communities across the country. It has been an honor to call him a colleague and friend, and I thank him for his selfless service."

"The opportunity to serve Indian Country under the leadership of President Obama and Secretary Jewell, and with my colleagues in Indian Affairs at Interior, has been the highest privilege of my life," Washburn said. "I have seen a level of trust develop with tribes in the nation-to-nation relationship under President Obama that has not existed in more than two hundred years of federal-tribal policy. It has been a very special time. I appreciate Secretary Jewell for leading with her heart and conscience on Native issues and encouraging the entire federal government to live up to its trust responsibility to tribes."

Following Washburn's departure, Roberts will serve as Acting Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs in January. Roberts is a member of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin and has served in leadership at Interior since 2012. He previously served as General Counsel of the National Indian Gaming Commission.

"Larry has been centrally involved in virtually every one of the Department's accomplishments in Indian Country the last three years and has been instrumental in developing a strong Indian Affairs team to carry the President's work to the end of the Administration," said Jewell. "With Larry's leadership, I am confident we will continue the strong momentum rooted in tribal self-determination and self-governance that Kevin has helped reignite."

Assistant Secretary Washburn advanced the Administration's commitment to tribal self-determination, including addressing past disputes through the Ramah settlement, improving the federal acknowledgement process, updating right-of-way regulations, and the land-into-trust process. Washburn has been fighting for mandatory funding for self-determination contract support costs. Washburn has also prioritized investment in the next generation of Indian Country, working with his colleagues at the Bureau of Indian Education to improve and transform the agency to better serve American Indian and Alaska Native youth.

Particularly meaningful to Washburn, the Department, under his guidance, has energetically executed the President's strategy to restore tribal homelands. Shortly after he took office, Washburn improved federal land-into-trust policy with the so-called "Patchak Patch" regulatory fix and helped reverse longstanding policy against federal trust lands in Alaska. He also worked to implement the HEARTH

Act, minimize state taxation of business activity on Indian reservations and helped establish the Land Buy Back Program which, in only two years of active land purchases, has invested nearly $730 million in Indian Country to restore nearly 1.5 million acres of land to Indian tribes.

Working with Indian Country and the U.S. Department of Justice, Washburn also helped implement the Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization of 2013, which now includes protections for Native American women, and he helped to implement the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010, which he had helped write as a law professor.

Washburn also oversaw the establishment of the White House Council on Native American Affairs. The Council is succeeding in producing better coordination across the federal government in services to Indian Country. With his team, Washburn also helped coordinate four of the seven annual White House Tribal Nations Conferences.

Washburn is the longest serving Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs since Ada Deer, who served from 1993 to 1997. Washburn succeeded Larry Echohawk who served nearly three years from May of 2009 through April of 2012.

During his time at the Department, Washburn has been on leave from the University of New Mexico, where he served as the dean of the School of Law.

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