Contributions from Land Buy-Back Program help fund opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native students

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WASHINGTON – The Department of the Interior today announced that an additional $4.8 million has been transferred to the Cobell Education Scholarship Fund (Scholarship Fund), bringing the total amount contributed so far to almost $39 million. The Scholarship Fund – funded in part by the Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations (Buy-Back Program) and authorized by the Cobell Settlement – provides financial assistance through scholarships to American Indian and Alaska Native students wishing to pursue post-secondary and graduate education and training.

The Scholarship Fund is managed and overseen by the Cobell Board of Trustees and will be administered this coming academic year by Indigenous Education, Inc., a non-profit corporation expressly created to administer the scholarship program. During the Scholarship Fund's inaugural year, approximately $2 million was awarded in graduate and undergraduate scholarships to nearly 400 highly qualified American Indian students. Applications and information concerning scholarships can be found at www.cobellscholar.org.

"This scholarship fund is opening doors for Native American students across Indian Country to pursue their dreams in the 21st Century workplace, and prepare themselves for leadership through higher education," said Interior Solicitor Hilary Tompkins, who negotiated the Cobell Settlement on behalf of the Department of the Interior. "The program carries out the vision of Elouise Cobell to enhance lifetime opportunities for American Indians and Alaskan Native students and is key to advancing self-determination for tribal nations."

Alex Pearl, Chairman of the Cobell Board of Trustees, said: "The Cobell Board of Trustees is committed to carrying on the legacy of Elouise Cobell. Our focus is on the prudent investment and management of our funds so that generations to come may benefit from Elouise's leadership and courage. We are excited to continue developing a first-rate 21st century scholarship program responsive to the needs of individual Indians. As was the case for Elouise, this fund focuses on individual Indians, not tribal governments, and enhancing the educational opportunities available to them throughout their academic careers."

The Buy-Back Program has thus far paid more than $740 million to individual landowners and restored the equivalent of nearly 1.5 million acres of land to tribal governments. Interior makes quarterly transfers to the Scholarship Fund as a result of Program sales, up to a total of $60 million. The amount contributed is based on a formula set forth in the Cobell Settlement that sets aside a certain amount of funding depending on the value of the fractionated interests sold. These contributions do not reduce the amount that an owner will receive.

The Buy-Back Program was created to implement the land consolidation component of the Cobell

Settlement, which provided $1.9 billion to purchase fractionated interests in trust or restricted land from willing landowners. Consolidated interests are transferred to tribal government ownership for uses benefiting the reservation community and tribal members.

More than 500 tribal leaders and landowners attended the Buy-Back Program's third Listening Session on March 3, 2016, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Interior Deputy Secretary Michael L. Connor, Special Trustee for American Indians Vince Logan, and Acting Assistant Secretary Indian Affairs Larry Roberts heard directly from tribal communities about how the Program can best be implemented across Indian Country. Materials from the Listening Session, including a transcript and presentations can be found at: https://www.doi.gov/buybackprogram/about/pastpresentations.

Landowners can contact the Trust Beneficiary Call Center at 888-678-6836 or visit their local Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) to update their contact information, ask questions about their land or purchase offers, and learn about financial planning resources.

More information and detailed frequently asked questions are available at http://www.doi.gov/buybackprogram to help individuals make informed decisions about their land. These include questions and issues raised at the most recent Listening Session