Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON, DC. – As a follow-up to the Tribal Conference held at the Department of the Interior this past November, today Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan met with prominent American Indian educators to discuss the educational challenges and opportunities facing tribal communities and share strategies that have helped to advance opportunities for American Indian students around the Nation.

“I asked these accomplished professionals, all of whom have exemplary records of educational service, to share their thoughts on the partnerships, projects and creative efforts that have proven successful in their schools and communities,” Salazar said. “It is essential that we continue to improve the delivery of educational services through our schools and programs while ensuring the concerns of Tribes and the best interests of American Indian students are addressed.”

“Today’s meeting was a critical first step in our partnership with the Department of Interior and tribal leaders to address the academic needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students,” said Duncan. “Our agenda is broad, our work is urgent, and we will collaborate to ensure that the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of these students are met.”

Improving Indian education was a major topic of discussion during President Obama’s historic meeting with tribal leaders at the Interior Department in November 2009. More than 400 members of federally recognized tribes participated in the event. “Following the White House Tribal Nations Conference, it was clear to me that we must do more to ensure that American Indian students receive an academically rigorous, culturally appropriate education that will prepare them to be productive citizens and leaders in their communities and help to build safer, stronger, healthier, and more prosperous Indian communities,” Salazar said.

Today’s discussion at Interior headquarters included a presentation on major concerns and challenges by Interior officials, including Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk, and a panel discussion by the experts, who described some of the experiences and education practices that have shown significant results in their states and tribal communities.

Interior’s Bureau of Indian Education educates more than 44,000 Indian students in 183 schools and two tribal colleges and the Obama Administration has made educational reform and improvements a focus of its assistance efforts in Indian Country. The goal of the Administration’s overall efforts, including the President’s $3 billion investment in Indian Country through the Recovery and reinvestment Act, is to help empower American Indian nations so they can build a future of their choosing.

The panelists included the following: **Patricia Whitefoot**, president of the National Indian Education Association; **Sam Deloria**, a nationally renowned Indian policy expert who was executive director of the American Indian Graduate Center; **Denise Juneau**, superintendant of Public Instruction for state of Montana (and the first American Indian to hold statewide office in Montana); **Ryan Wilson**, president

of the National Alliance to Save Native Languages and former president of the National Indian Education Association; **Keith Moore**, former director of Indian Education for South Dakota's Department of Education; **Benny Shendo**, former cabinet secretary of Indian Affairs for the state of New Mexico and director of the American Indian Program at Stanford University; **Colin Kippen**, former senior counsel to the Senate Indian Affairs Committee; **Kara Bobroff,** founder of the Native American Community Academy; **Patrick Shannon**, a former appointee of Michigan Gov. Granholm, overseeing more than 40 charter schools throughout Michigan, with more than 10,000 students; **Robert Cook**, former president of the National Indian Education Association; and **Notah Begay**: founder of the Notah Begay III Foundation which promotes the health, wellness and leadership development of Native American youth.

Image of participants at meeting is available on line at
http://www.doi.gov/news/10_News_Releases/U.S.DepartmentoftheInterior-Bu...

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar discusses strategies for improving Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs educational programs and services with a panel of experts. To the left of the Secretary are Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (blue shirt) and Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk. To the right of the Secretary are Kim Teehee, Senior Policy Advisor for Native American Affairs at the White House Domestic Policy Council; and Keith Moore, former director of Indian Education for South Dakota's Department of Education. Photo by Tami Heilemenn, DOI.