Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: June 14, 2011
Print PDF

WASHINGTON – In a keynote address to tribal leaders attending the National Congress of American Indians 2011 Mid-Year Conference in Milwaukee, Wis., Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk today described the progress being made in a comprehensive agenda to restore integrity in U.S. government relations with American Indian and Alaska Native leaders, fulfill trust responsibilities to tribal members, and to work cooperatively to build stronger economies and safer tribal communities.

"It is always an honor to work with the NCAI in shaping meaningful action for the future of Indian Country," Echo Hawk said. "Over the past two years, Indian Affairs has listened to tribal leaders and to Indian Country about implementing real change, and we will work to carry the positive momentum forward as we reform, restructure and rebuild federal relations with Indian Country."

Through his extensive travels to numerous tribal communities across Indian Country, the Assistant Secretary and his team have seen firsthand the positive results from, and the continued need for, the government-to-government relationship between the federal government and tribal nations. One of the most prominent features of the Echo Hawk's tenure has been a commitment to restoring tribal homelands, economies and tribal self-determination.

For a document on AS-IA initiatives to date, please click: http://www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/ASIA/index.htm.

In terms of federal policy, the Assistant Secretary was involved from the beginning of President Obama's decision to review the United States' position on the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and was instrumental in the review process. This effort led to the President's decision to endorse the Declaration in December 2010. The Interior Department and Indian Affairs have worked to fulfill Executive Order 13175 on tribal consultation. The DOI is currently consulting with tribal leaders on its department-wide tribal consultation policy.

In addition to these accomplishments, there are other policy areas that the Assistant Secretary feels are essential to restoring tribal self-governance that need further attention. These would be areas that impact consultation with the tribes, the unique needs of Alaska Natives, improvements in federal recognition, restrictive state-tribal relationships, and a Carcieri-fix that articulates the full scope of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934.

The Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs has responsibility for helping the Secretary of the Interior to fulfill his trust responsibilities to tribal and individual trust beneficiaries and promoting self-determination and self-governance for the nation's 565 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes. The Assistant Secretary oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), which supports tribal agriculture, and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), which administers one of two federal school systems and funding to tribal colleges and universities.