Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: February 9, 2011
Print PDF

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk announced today that the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools will participate in the Presidential Active Lifestyle Award (PALA) Challenge inspired by the First Lady's Let's Move! initiative and commemorating the Let's Move! one year anniversary. PALA is a six-week long physical fitness challenge managed by the President's Council on Physical Fitness, Sports, & Nutrition (PCFSN) and is part of the First Lady's Let's Move! campaign to end childhood obesity within a generation. Levi Horn, a professional football player with the Chicago Bears, member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe and representative of Nike's programs for Native American and Aboriginal communities, called Nike N7, will be the face of this program.

"I want to challenge every BIE school to join First Lady Michelle Obama in combating childhood obesity through the Presidential Active Lifestyle Award (PALA) and help meet the million PALA challenge goal," Echo Hawk said. "Obesity and related diseases affect our communities and children in disproportionate ways that need to be addressed immediately, and this challenge is a great step in the right direction to help change the health and quality of life for our children in Indian Country."

"As a Native American, with most of my family coming from the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, I've personally witnessed the effects of childhood obesity on my community," said Levi Horn. "I am encouraged by the efforts of the Bureau of Indian Education in fostering healthy lifestyles through the Presidential Active Lifestyle Award, and hope that my story will be an inspiration to native students around the country."

Today, obesity rates in Indian Country are higher than those of any other racial or ethnic group studied. Obesity is twice as common among four year old American Indian and Alaska Native children (31 percent) than among white (16 percent) or Asian (13 percent) children. This is a health and quality of life issue that cannot continue to go unaddressed.

The goals of the challenge are:

- Every person commits to participating in some form of physical activity five days a week, for six out of eight weeks.
- Youth, ages 18 and under, have to complete 60 minutes of activity and adults have to complete 30 minutes of activity.
- At the end of eight weeks, anyone who successfully accomplishes the challenge will receive a special presidential award.

BIE schools will have 8 weeks to complete the challenge with incentives of special awards given to both students and schools. The goal is to get 25,000 people across Indian Country and to support the President's 1 million participants PALA challenge by August 2012.

"This is a tremendous opportunity for our schools to participate in a positive and inspirational event," said Director of the Bureau of Indian Education Keith Moore. "I believe that physical fitness is a key

component to a happy, successful life and I hope that the BIE schools and the PALA Coordinators will help lead the way in Indian Country to provide an example for all of our communities to follow."

BIE is also engaging in Let's Move Outside!, the outdoor activity component of the First Lady's Let's Move! initiative to end childhood obesity. Led by the Departments of Interior and Agriculture, Let's Move Outside! is working with government agencies and other organizations to help America's kids and families get moving in the great outdoors. Traditional outdoor activities such as archery, canoeing, and lacrosse, allow Native youth to improve their health, while connecting with their heritage.

Nike and BIE signed a Memorandum of Understanding in May 2010 to work together in creative and inspirational ways to address health and social-lifestyle choices in American Indian and Alaska Native communities that contribute to disease and other medical conditions. Nike began its program for Native American communities in the U.S. and Aboriginal communities in Canada, more than 10 years ago with a commitment to bring sport and all of its benefits to members of these communities, with a focus on youth. The program allows Native American and Aboriginal health programs to purchase Nike products, including the specially designed Air Native N7, at reduced prices via nike.net as incentives for health promotion and disease prevention. The N7 fund provides grants to fund youth sports and physical fitness programs, and the N7 collection raises awareness for the N7 fund. For more information, visit www.niken7.com.

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-Indian Affairs oversees the Bureau of Indian Education which operates the federal school system for American Indian and Alaska Native children from the federally recognized tribes. The BIE implements federal education laws, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, in and provides funding to 183 elementary and secondary day and boarding schools and peripheral dormitories located on 64 reservations in 23 states and Page 3 – PALA BIE serving approximately 42,000 students. The BIE also serves post secondary students through higher education scholarships and support funding to 26 tribal colleges and universities. It directly operates two post secondary institutions: Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan., and the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque, N.M. For more information, please visit www.indianaffairs.gov