Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today was joined by college football All-American and Rhodes Scholar Myron Rolle to announce a new partnership that will introduce an innovative physical fitness and health program into Interior-funded American Indian schools.

“Our objective in this initiative is to inspire American Indian and Native Alaskan students to live healthier lifestyles through exercise, outdoor activity, and proper nutrition,” Secretary Salazar said. “The program developed by the Myron Rolle Foundation will celebrate the uniqueness of their heritage and identity in curriculum, develop trust amongst peers, train leaders and involve the community to ensure their needs are met.”

“The Bureau of Indian Education-funded schools are excited to participate in this initiative,” said Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk. “They look forward to implementing the innovative features of this program that encourages children and their families to incorporate physical fitness and healthy choices into their daily lives.”

“I am inspired by the way American Indian tribes have persevered and thrived, while retaining their cultural heritage and identity,” Rolle said. “There are, however, significant health concerns that challenge this population -- in particular diabetes and obesity. Through the *Our Way to Health Program*, our goal is to encourage and help American Indian children in middle school to begin managing not only their own diet and exercise but, hopefully by extension, influence the adults in their lives to also begin adopting healthy life style changes.”

Our Way to Health provides incentive-based learning experiences, team-building physical activities in the outdoors, health education and diabetes awareness sessions. Rolle initially developed the curriculum for American Indian fifth-graders at a charter school in Okeechobee, Florida, when he was working with the Seminole Tribe. Rolle was an All-American safety for Florida State University in 2008-2009, but has delayed entering the National Football League to pursue studies as a Rhodes Scholar at the University of Oxford.

Initially, Interior will expand the Our Way to Health program to five Bureau of Indian Education-funded schools in New Mexico and Arizona beginning in the fall of 2009. Three of the schools are in Arizona and two are in New Mexico. The schools are:

1. San Felipe Pueblo Elementary School (San Felipe Pueblo, New Mexico)
2. Isleta Elementary School (Albuquerque, New Mexico)
3. Hotevilla Bacavi Community School (Hotevilla, Arizona)
4. Tuba City Boarding School (Tuba City, Arizona)
5. Keams Canyon Elementary School (Kearns Canyon, Arizona)

Features of the program include two visits to each school by Myron Rolle and a visit at the end of the semester to a National Football League or collegiate sporting event . The curriculum will allow the Bureau of Indian Education to reach students in a new and direct way. The program is competitive, fun,

rewarding and will be tailored to meet each school’s individual needs.

Interior’s Bureau of Indian Education serves 42,000 students in 183 schools and dormitories across the country on 64 reservations in 23 states. The mission statement of BIE reflects its commitment to “manifest consideration of the whole person by taking into account the spiritual, mental, physical, and cultural aspects of the individual.”