Funds provided for historic school under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will lead to improvements in learning, energy use and employment on the Navajo Reservation

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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk joined Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley and other Indian Affairs and Navajo tribal officials September 16 in a ceremonial groundbreaking event for Phase II of a major school replacement and improvement project at the historic Rough Rock Community School on the Navajo Reservation in northeastern Arizona. The project is funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) and is being carried out under the Indian Affairs Office of Facilities, Environmental and Cultural Resources (OFECR) in conjunction with the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), the Navajo Nation and the Rough Rock Community School.

"The Rough Rock Community School Replacement Project is an important priority for the Interior Department and Bureau of Indian Education," Echo Hawk said. "The $52.5 million provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will revitalize this historic school by creating an improved learning environment for its students, teachers and staff, as well as bringing much-needed jobs to the Navajo people."

Accompanying Echo Hawk and Shirley to witness the ceremony were OFECR Director John "Jack" Rever, OFECR Office of Facilities Management and Construction Deputy Director Emerson Eskeets, Acting BIE Director Kevin Skenandore, Bureau of Indian Affairs Navajo Regional Office Director Omar Bradley, Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education Superintendent Andrew Tah and Rough Rock Community School Superintendent Dr. Monty Roessel. Also present were students from the school's Navajo Language Immersion class. Following the event, the group toured the project's initial site to view the progress of construction there.

"The Rough Rock Community School is a symbol of tribal self-determination that is at the heart of Navajo education," Shirley said. "I want to express my deep appreciation for the funding that has made this replacement and repair project possible. I am pleased at the attention being paid to improving this historic school, and to the economic and employment opportunities that the project brings to our reservation."

Opened in July 1966 as the Rough Rock Demonstration School, the facility was the first Bureau of Indian Affairs school to be directly operated by American Indians themselves, as well as being the first Navajo-operated BIA school. The K-12 school, which currently serves approximately 440 day and residential students, is still a part of the Bureau school system, now administered by the BIE.

The project is being built in two parts. Phase I, which began on June 15, is the construction of a replacement K-8 dormitory for residential students. Phase II will be the replacement of a K-8 academic building and two dormitories. Other structures on the Rough Rock campus also will receive improvements. The project, which must be completed within two years, is being developed to meet the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) Silver Certification criteria.

In addition to applying green design, materials and technology, the Rough Rock Community School Replacement Project, which is on the BIE's 2004 Replacement School Construction Priority List, also meets ARRA requirements for being "shovel-ready" and creating jobs. The OFECR estimates that the project will create 40 to 50 jobs that will provide employment to Navajo tribal members.

The Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs oversees the Bureau of Indian Education, which operates one of two federal school systems (the other is under the Department of Defense). The Bureau funds 183 elementary and secondary day and boarding schools located on 64 federal Indian reservations in 23 states serving approximately 42,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students. The Bureau also services American Indian and Alaska Native post secondary students through higher education scholarships and support funding to 26 tribal colleges and universities and two technical colleges. It also directly operates two post secondary institutions: Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan., and the Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque, N.M.

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