Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Bismarck, N.D. – Surrounded by fourth through eighth grade students at the Theodore Jamerson Elementary School, who joined him in viewing President Obama's address on the importance of learning to their future, Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk underscored the President's message by relating to them the importance of education in his own life.

"I come from a family that places a high value on education," Echo Hawk said. "The path through the school door led me on a journey of learning and experience that I enjoyed. It has led me to being here with you today as the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs. I know that same path leads through every school door. With hard work and dedication, it, too, can take you on a journey as rewarding as mine has been."

The Theodore Jamerson Elementary School is a K-8 day school funded by the Interior Department's Bureau of Indian Education. It is located on the campus of the United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, where for 35 years it has served to educate the children of UTTC students.

"Theodore Jamerson is complementary to and a critical part of UTTC's education mission," said Principal F. Sam Azure. "We support UTTC students as they pursue their academic goals by ensuring that their children have the same opportunity for a better life through education."

The school, which is comprised of six buildings on approximately one and a half acres within the campus grounds, follows the North Dakota standards of learning for instruction and assessing student performance. The current school year enrolled student population of 175 represents 20 tribes from Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota and Wyoming.

Since taking office, the President has repeatedly focused on education and his belief in its critical role in building a new foundation for the American economy and in improving the lives of all Americans. He has challenged the nation's students to work hard, set educational goals and take responsibility for their learning.

He also has called for a shared responsibility and commitment on the part of students, parents and educators to ensure that every child in every school receives the best education possible – one that will bolster America's competitiveness in the global economy and prepare individuals to become productive members of their communities and the nation.

The Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs oversees the Bureau of Indian Education, which operates one of two federal school systems (the other belongs to 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, including UTTC, and directly operates two institutions: Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan., and the Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque, N.M.