Event Highlights Obama Administration's American Indian Appointees

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WASHINGTON – The Interior Department's Sidney R. Yates Auditorium resounded with drum beats and applause this morning as Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar administered the oath of office to the Obama Administration's Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Larry Echo Hawk. The ceremony took place before an estimated crowd of 300 that included family members, tribal representatives, and Interior and other federal employees. "Today is not a day for long speeches," Echo Hawk said. "It is a day for solemn oaths, a day for thanksgiving, and a day for prayers. I am honored to have been entrusted with this responsibility."

"Today is another milestone in President Obama's agenda to **empower Native American communities**," Salazar said. "Across the government, agencies are working together and with tribes to help build new schools, improve health care access, upgrade housing, fix roads and bridges, and make communities safer."

In attendance were officials from the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, where Echo Hawk is an enrolled member, and the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation of Idaho, who, as he explained, gave a fresh law school graduate his professional start more than 30 years ago when they hired him as their Chief General Legal Counsel. The Assistant Secretary expressed his deep appreciation to both tribes and to his family for their support and encouragement.

Also among those in attendance were Congressman Eni F. H. Faleomavaega, American Samoa; Senate Indian Affairs Committee staff members; and Obama Administration appointees Jodi Gillette (Standing Rock Sioux) Deputy Associate Director, White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs; Dr. Yvette Roubideaux (Rosebud Sioux), Director, Indian Health Service, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Hilary Tompkins (Navajo Nation), Solicitor, U.S. Department of the Interior; Michael L. Connor (Taos Pueblo), Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Department of the Interior; Wizipan Garriott (Rosebud Sioux), Advisor to the Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs; and Paul Tsosie (Navajo Nation), Chief of Staff to the Assistant Secretary. Also attending was Kimberly Teehee (Cherokee Nation), who is the incoming Senior Policy Advisor for Native American Affairs at the White House Domestic Policy Council.

Echo Hawk noted as "historic" the number of American Indians who have been appointed by President Obama to White House and Executive Branch posts: "Future generations will look back on this time and know that something special happened."

Witnessing the gathering was a group of students from the Muckleshoot Tribal School, a Bureau of Indian Education-funded K-12 school in Auburn, Wash., serving the Muckleshoot Tribe. The students happened to be visiting the city when they received word of the swearing-in ceremony in time to attend.

Echo Hawk is the 11th Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs. He was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on May 19, 2009, and was officially sworn into office in a private ceremony at the Interior Department on May 22.