Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Discussions started with Secretary Salazar, tribal leaders and tribal organizations

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk has begun his administration by moving quickly to begin discussions with Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, tribal leaders and tribal organizations on economic, energy, education, public safety and other issues that need to be addressed in Indian Country.

"President Obama, Secretary Salazar, the Congress and tribal leaders want to see Indian Affairs move quickly to address Indian Country's most pressing issues," Echo Hawk said. "The current economic conditions, while improving, still have a disproportionate impact on rural, remote tribal communities. We are moving forward to implement the Recovery Act, and I have begun reaching out to tribal leaders throughout our regions to hear their views on what solutions are needed."

After spending last week moving his family and household from Utah to the Washington, D.C., area, Echo Hawk arrived in his new office early Monday morning where his week started with a round of meetings, the first with Secretary Salazar on formulating their action plan for implementing the President's vision for Indian Country. He has since held a number of staff briefings, made phone calls to about 20 tribal leaders so far, visited several Senate offices, and met yesterday with representatives of the National Congress of American Indians (www.ncai.org) at the organization's new headquarters in downtown Washington.

While his meeting with NCAI, the nation's oldest national tribal association, was his first as the assistant secretary, Echo Hawk, who will speak to the group at its mid-year conference in Niagara Falls, N.Y., this month, also is planning on reaching out to other American Indian and Alaska Native organizations about addressing the tribes' long-neglected social, economic and infrastructure needs.

"I want American Indians and Alaska Natives to know we are ready to address their concerns," Echo Hawk said. "Government can be part of the solution to problems if it takes the time to listen, learns from its mistakes and seeks the best results. Now is the time for us to take action."

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 562 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes. The Assistant Secretary oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), which administers one of two federal school systems.

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