Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Carl J. Artman today announced he has appointed Montana attorney Majel Russell, an enrolled member of the Crow Tribe of Montana, as his new Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs. Russell succeeds George T. Skibine, the acting principle deputy assistant secretary since April 2, 2007, who will continue in his current position as director of the Indian Affairs Office of Indian Gaming Management. Russell's appointment became effective on August 20, 2007.

"I am pleased that Majel Russell has joined my office as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs," Artman said. "I will rely on her extensive experience and commitment to Indian people as we move forward to make Indian Affairs more responsive to the tribes and their needs."

A Montana native raised on her tribe's reservation located in the southeastern portion of the state, Russell has a background in tribal law and Indian child welfare stemming from her career as a social worker and juvenile officer and as a graduate of the University of Montana School of Law. She has worked for her tribe as inhouse counsel and more recently as its outside legal advisor.

"My career has been about seeking to improve the quality of life in tribal communities and improving the quality of tribal governance through modernization and reform," Russell said. "I want to express my appreciation to Assistant Secretary Artman for this tremendous opportunity, and I am looking forward to working with him to address issues that are important to Indian Country."

Upon receiving her law degree, Russell went to work for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana where she served as the tribes' lead prosecutor handling criminal cases, enforcement of tribal hunting and fishing regulations and other matters.

She left the tribe to enter private practice in Great Falls, Mont., and later joined the firm of Smith, Guenther and Monteau where she represented numerous tribes in the state as well as in Nevada and Washington State on Indian housing, Indian child welfare and tribal self-governance matters.

In 1996, she established the Elk River Law Office in Billings, and with her partner, Sam Painter, represented tribes, tribal businesses and local governments, and where she worked with the Crow Tribe on a major rewriting of its constitution. Until her recent appointment, she represented tribes on state and federal litigation efforts, tribal government development, tribal court enhancement, water rights negotiations, mineral and natural resource development, trust management reform and gaming, and has litigated Indian Child Welfare Act cases. She also has represented several national organizations in the areas of Indian education, trust reform and wildlife restoration.

Russell is a graduate of Lodge Grass High School on the Crow Indian Reservation and from Eastern Montana College (now Montana State University – Billings), where she earned her degree with dual majors in psychology and sociology and where she received the "Outstanding Senior from EMC's Class of 1984" award, the school's highest honor. In 1991, she received the "Outstanding Senior Award" as a member of UM's law school graduating class that year. She is licensed to practice law in the State of

Montana and has been admitted to the United States Supreme Court.

The Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs serves as the first assistant and principal advisor to the Assistant Secretary on policies regarding the administration of Office of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) programs.
