# Tribal Leaders, Federal Partners Begin Crucial Dialogue on Indian Country's Economic Policy Agenda

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PHOENIX - Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne opened the first-ever National Native American Economic Policy Summit with a video-taped message to over 500 tribal leaders, federal officials and leaders of Native organizations encouraging Summit participants to "work together collaboratively to formulate policy recommendations that will improve the quality of life in America's diverse and growing indigenous communities."

The goals of the Summit are to establish sounds economic policy recommendations that will provide short-term and long-term goals to ensure economic prosperity in Indian communities now and in the future.

"If we have learned anything from the success and failure of federal policies in Indian Country, it is that Native nations prosper not when they rely foremost on federal aid and guidance but when they hold to their sovereignty and make their own economic choices," said Kempthorne.

Conference participants will breakout into separate session track that will focus on three key areas: Capital and Finance, Business Development and Infrastructure.

"There is no social program in this country as important as a good job that pays well," said U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) is a video-message. "I am committed to addressing these issues. We have to find new jobs in our communities. Its time to begin and continue this discussion which is central to whether or not we make progress and I am determined to working with you to begin making real progress."

"I thank Secretary Kempthorne and the Department of Interior for responding to the need for this Summit," said National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) President Joe A. Garcia. "This dialogue will move our agenda forward, strengthen our communities and benefit generations of Indian people."

The Summit will conclude Thursday, May 17, 2007 with a press conference that will lay out the policy recommendations agreed upon during the Summit. The press conference will feature Carl Artman, Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, and Jacqueline Johnson, executive director of NCAI.

Press may participate in the conference by teleconference. Call in number: 1-866-287-5993 Passcode: 596941#