New assistant secretary to emphasize front line services to Indian Country

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WASHINGTON – Interior's new Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, David W. Anderson, pledged to work with tribes for the betterment of Indian people and to put greater emphasis on supporting Bureau of Indian Affairs employees in the field during his public swearing-in ceremony today with Secretary Gale Norton. Accompanied by his sister in full tribal dress who held a bible for his swearing-in, Anderson took the oath of office administered by Secretary Norton in front of over 100 attendees comprised of tribal officials and departmental employees. "I am looking forward to working with tribes and tribal leaders," Anderson said. "My administration will be in the field serving two customers: BIA employees and the tribes."

Secretary Norton publicly welcomed Anderson as the newest addition to her staff. "His enthusiasm and great compassion for Indian people will be a big asset to Indian Affairs," Norton said. Anderson was also joined by officials of the Lac Courte Oreilles Lake Superior Band of Ojibwa in Wisconsin, where he is an enrolled member, and Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma, from whom he also shares ancestry. A private swearing-in was held for Anderson on Feb. 2.

David Anderson is a nationally recognized entrepreneur whose background includes that of corporate turnaround specialist, cookbook author, motivational speaker, philanthropist, and, as founder and chairman of Famous Dave's of America, Inc., one of the nation's fastest growing chains of family restaurants, a successful restaurateur.

As the ninth Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs to be confirmed since Congress established the position in the late 1970s, Anderson will help the department fulfill its trust responsibilities to individual and tribal trust beneficiaries. He also will promote the self-determination and economic well being of the nation's 562 Federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and their 1.8 million members. The Assistant Secretary also oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the 179-year old agency that provides services to individual American Indians and Alaska Natives from the Federally recognized tribes, the Office of Federal Acknowledgment, which administers the Federal Acknowledgment Process; and the BIA school system, which serves almost 50,000 American Indian children in 23 states.

During the course of his business career, Anderson helped found three publicly traded companies, creating over 18,000 new jobs, and reorganized several failing businesses in Indian Country that turned them into financially successful operations. For example, as chief executive officer for Lac Courte Oreilles Chippewa tribal enterprises in 1982, Anderson created a management team that successfully rebuilt reservation businesses into profitable and stable operations. Under his leadership, their gross revenues increased from $3.9 million to $8.0 million – an achievement recognized by President Reagan's Presidential Commission on Indian Reservation Economies.

As a philanthropist, Anderson is known for his dedication to the American Indian community after having donated more than $6 million to Indian advancement programs and having established a national organization to help young Indian people.

In 1999, the Anderson Family itself provided $1.4 million to establish the YouthSkills Foundation, an organization that helps disadvantaged American Indian children. The foundation is supported by proceeds from Anderson's award-winning BBQ cookbook, "Famous Dave's Backroads & Sidestreets" (1999) and his most recent book, "LifeSkills for Success" (2004).

In 2001, Anderson founded the LifeSkills Center for Leadership, an organization offering life-changing programs for at-risk Indian youth and young adults. The center made such an impression on television personality Oprah Winfrey that her Angel Network supported its work with a $25,000 grant the next year.

Anderson also has served on numerous national and state commissions, including the Presidential Advisory Council for Tribal Colleges and Universities (2001), the National Task Force on Reservation Gambling (1983), the Council on Minority Business Development for the State of Wisconsin (1983) and the Wisconsin Council on Tourism (1983), as well as Harvard University's Native American Program Advisory Council. In 2003, he was appointed by Interior Secretary Gale Norton to the American Indian Education Foundation, a non-profit organization established by Congress to accept contributions from private citizens and groups to support the education of Indian students at BIA schools.

Anderson has used his business and life experiences to help others through public speaking, and by sharing his optimism and inspiration with youth groups and community organizations. He has received numerous honors for his efforts including being named a Bush Leadership Fellow (1985); recognition as Minnesota and Dakota's Emerging Entrepreneur of the Year by the Wall Street firm Ernst & Young, NASDAQ and USA Today (1997); designated Restaurateur of the Year by Minneapolis-St. Paul Magazine (1998) and being chosen by his community as an Olympic Torch carrier for the 2002 Winter Olympics held in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Anderson received a Master's degree in Public Administration from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government in 1986. He and his wife have maintained their family's home in Edina, Minnesota.