Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON - Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Neal A. McCaleb today announced the formation of the National Indian Country Telecom Infrastructure Consortium (NICTIC) to coordinate an effort to build and improve the telecommunications infrastructure throughout Indian Country. "Creating this consortium supports the President's National Strategy for Homeland Security by providing critical direction to improving the telecommunications infrastructure in Indian Country," said Assistant Secretary Neal McCaleb. "It will improve the capabilities of law enforcement, medical emergency response, border control and infrastructure protection."

The goals of the Consortium are to: 1) develop an Indian Country telecommunications resource inventory; 2) establish an Indian Country telecommunications network architecture; 3) establish an Indian Country telecommunications integration model and 4) encourage cooperation between Federal, state, local and tribal organizations to share the cost of telecommunications infrastructure and provide technical assistance and aide to tribes in obtaining Federal grant funds and loan programs available each year from Federal agencies.

The NICTIC will hold their second meeting today, October 17, 2002, in conjunction with the Federal Wireless Users Forum in Las Vegas, Nev. The Consortium's first meeting was jointly hosted by DOI - Indian Affairs and the General Services Administration (GSA) on September 18, 2002, in Phoenix, Ariz., during the National Summit on Emerging Tribal Economies. Other organizations represented were the Office of Homeland Security, the Federal Communications Commission, Mescalero Apache Telecommunications, San Carlos Apache Telecommunications, WorldCom, IndigiCom, Network Infrastructure Corporation and Information Services Support, Inc.

The NICTIC strategy for implementing the Indian Country telecommunications infrastructure calls for three phases. Phase one will identify connectivity for each organization's program offices, regional offices and agencies. Phase two would identify opportunities to share connectivity to other Federal agencies that provide services to Federally recognized tribes including the Indian Health Service and the Office of Native American Programs, within the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Phase three would identify opportunities to share connectivity to Federally recognized tribes, state and local governments through coordination and collaboration of tribal organizations and Federal Agencies that provide funding to the tribe for telecommunications, such as tribal organizations, the Rural Utility Service/Department of Agriculture (USDA), Lifeline Assistance Program, FCC, Homeland Security and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

"The last mile of infrastructure is the main roadblock to comprehensive services in remote areas throughout Indian Country," said Brian Burns, Indian Affairs Chief Information Officer. "No one entity can provide all the necessary resources to get the job done. The National Indian Country Telecom Infrastructure Consortium will work to utilize the necessary technological resources available to ensure success in building wireless telecommunications infrastructure."

"In conjunction with DOI - Indian Affairs, the General Services Administration's Federal Technology Service (FTS) is proud to support the National Indian Country Telecom Infrastructure Consortium that

will bring a single interoperability Land Mobile Radio (LMR) infrastructure to NICTIC while maintaining the telecommunications autonomy of each individual Native American Nation. The Land Mobile Radio solution provided on the FTS2001 contract meets the requirement of the President's e-Government initiative SAFECOM," said Denny Groh, Deputy Assistant Commissioner, Delivery Services, FTS GSA.

The Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs has responsibility for fulfilling the Department's trust responsibility to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and individuals, as well as promoting tribal self-determination and economic development. The Assistant Secretary oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which is responsible for providing services to approximately 1.4 million American Indians and Alaska Natives and the nation's 562 Federally recognized tribes.
