Summit on Emerging Tribal Economies Provides Springboard for Action

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WASHINGTON – Building on the momentum created by the National Summit on Emerging Tribal Economies, Interior Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Neal A. McCaleb today announced that he plans to use the event as a springboard for developing a national strategy on reducing unemployment and enhancing economic development in Indian Country.

“As we expected, the National Summit on Emerging Tribal Economies produced a host of good ideas, generated a great deal of excitement about Indian economic development and created a vast number of new relationships among Indian businesses, Corporate America and federal agencies” said McCaleb. “Our challenge now is to use these ideas to develop a strategic plan for achieving the goals of creating 100,000 new jobs in Indian Country by 2008 and establishing sustainable, market-driven tribal economies by 2020.”

It was all business for the estimated 1,600 participants who gathered at the Summit in Phoenix, Ariz., on September 16-19, 2002, to hear from and interact with representatives from government and business offering insights and resources for improving economic conditions in tribal communities across the nation. Representatives from tribal governments, federal agencies, tribal and individual Indian businesses and corporations came from 45 states to begin a dialogue on how to create jobs and stimulate economic development in Indian Country.

Assistant Secretary McCaleb will work with the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ (BIA) Tribal Leaders Budget Task Force Subcommittee on Economic Development to begin developing a national strategy to achieve the Summit’s employment and economic goals. McCaleb chairs the subcommittee with Governor Bill Anoatubby of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma and Tex Hall, Chairman of the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota. Efforts also will be made to work with tribal economic development organizations to inform and educate corporations about doing business in Indian Country.

“We heard a number of tribal and private sector firms at the Summit talk about their experiences and successful partnerships with federal agencies,” said McCaleb. “Secretary Norton and I are committed to assisting tribes with achieving their economic and employment goals by using the federal resources they can access now, which are numerous.”

In December 2001, the General Accounting Office (GAO) released a report entitled *Federal Assistance Programs for American Indians and Alaska Natives* that identified 100 federal programs available to tribes, or their members, for economic development activities.

McCaleb also cited President Bush’s new initiative to reduce forest fires by thinning overgrowth and re-seeding burned areas as an opportunity for tribal businesses. “For years, many Indian firefighters have

risked their lives to protect homes, families and communities across the country from the devastating effects of forest fires," said McCaleb. "Tribes that provide forest thinning and re-seeding services could save lives and property, and provide new employment opportunities for their members, as well."

The 2002 National Summit on Emerging Tribal Economies provided a venue for over 100 successful Indian businesses to promote themselves to new audiences, network with prospective business partners and learn about resources that can support their business plans.

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.
