Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: September 19, 2002
Print PDF

PHOENIX – In an address yesterday before a large crowd of tribal government and business leaders attending the National Summit on Emerging Tribal Economies, Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Neal A. McCaleb drew upon his 30 years of experience as an entrepreneur to point out the importance of partnerships between tribes and federal agencies and corporations.

“Partnerships are a powerful tool” for tribal businesses to use, McCaleb said, citing the role they play in the business world as a mechanism for creating profits and expanding market share.

The Assistant Secretary explained what he considered to be the essential elements of a good business partnership: 1) a shared goal that is well-defined and of mutual importance to each partner, 2) complementary capabilities whereby each partner brings different skills and resources to the partnership, 3) clear and timely communication between the partners and 4) trust and confidence partners have in each other and in the partnership. He also stressed how important honesty, competence, commitment to goals and balancing risk and reward are to successful partnerships.

“Tribal leaders make decisions every day about weighing the risks of partnerships against the rewards of bringing economic and employment benefits to their communities,” McCaleb said. “To me, that is the exercise of sovereignty.”

McCaleb said tribal leaders should explain clearly to their council members, citizens and other stakeholders the benefits of the tribe’s partnerships. He also recommended that when considering using the partnership approach, tribal leaders should look at establishing a clear separation of powers between the tribal government and the tribal business, ensuring continuity of business plans during periods of change within the tribal government, establishing an orderly transition of power from administration to administration that does not adversely impact tribal businesses, having a fair and timely method for resolving differences within the partnership and developing clear mechanisms for dissolving a partnership when it is no longer needed.

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.