Announces Tribal Economic Summit for September 16-19 in Phoenix

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For Immediate Release: June 20, 2002
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WASHINGTON – In a speech before tribal leaders this week on improving economic conditions in Indian Country, Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Neal A. McCaleb called on tribes to choose prosperity over poverty. "We can choose between poverty and prosperity," McCaleb said. "Most of us would choose prosperity, so why has Indian America remained mired in poverty?" The Assistant Secretary spoke on June 18 at the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) 2002 Mid-Year Conference in Bismarck, N.D. The NCAI is the oldest and largest association of tribal governments in the U.S.

In his speech, McCaleb shared his ideas on how to bring economic prosperity to the nation's 559 federally recognized tribes. Stressing the need for tribal leaders to be willing to take action and accept change in order to improve poor economic conditions in their communities, McCaleb observed, "If you keep on doing what you've always done, then you're always going to get what you've always gotten."

McCaleb noted while having access to capital, markets and a skilled workforce are important in creating a positive economic climate, tribal governments also need to establish business and legal environments that minimize risk for investors, and improve educational opportunities for tribal members.

He also pointed out the need to develop reservation-based technology and energy resource development companies, create Indian-owned and controlled sources of capital, expand the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Indian Loan Guaranty Program, and accelerate educational improvement and technical skills development through BIA funded and operated schools and tribal colleges.

McCaleb endorsed the goals of creating 100,000 new jobs in Indian Country by 2008 and generating $1 billion per year in direct contracts with Indian-owned industries by 2005 by utilizing the Small Business Administration (SBA) and expanding the Buy Indian Act.

He also announced that a National Summit on Emerging Tribal Economies, whose theme is "Building Sustainable Tribal Economies," will be held September 16-19, 2002 in Phoenix, Ariz. The event will bring corporations and federal agencies together with tribal leaders to discuss ways of producing employment opportunities in Indian Country and developing processes for sustainable, market-driven tribal economies. The summit also will showcase successful Indian Country businesses.

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 federally recognized tribes.