Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON, DC - At a press conference at the National Press Club today, Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne announced budget increases for Indian Country initiatives and joined Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen Johnson and other Administration officials and Indian leaders in announcing a new Native American-focused training course. Called "Working Effectively with Tribal Governments," the online course is now available to federal employees.

"This new online training is just one of the programs by which we are supporting the efforts of Native Americans to improve their lives," Secretary Kempthorne said. In a preview of the Department of the Interior budget to be unveiled on Monday, he announced proposed FY 2009 budget increases for two Department of the Interior initiatives begun in FY 2008-the Improving Indian Education Initiative and the Safe Indian Communities Initiative.

In order to assist tribes in suppressing the distribution of methamphetamine by organized crime and drug cartels, the Administration's budget proposal would sustain the full $24 million in funding for the Safe Indian Communities Initiative provided by Congress in 2008, plus add $3million more for the initiative, for a total of $27 million in 2009. Likewise, in 2009 the Administration proposes not only to maintain the full funding for the Improving Indian Education Initiative but also to increase it to more than $25 million.

"The Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs will not cease to provide support for these programs until we shut down the peddlers of poison who are victimizing Native American families - and particularly Indian children," said Kempthorne. "It is not enough, however, to simply-protect Indian children from drugs and crime. We must also help them to achieve a brighter future through better educational opportunities in Indian Country."

Administrator Johnson and the other Administration officials then launched the new on-line training course for federal employees. Joe Garcia, President of the National Congress of American Indians, gave the invocation at the National Press Club event. In addition to Kempthorne and Johnson, other participants included Jovita Carranza, Small Business Administration Deputy Administrator; Janet Creighton, Deputy Assistant to the President and Director of Intergovernmental Affairs; Carl Artman, Assistant Secretary of the Interior - Indian Affairs; Jeffrey Sedgwick, Acting Assistant Attorney General; and John Nau, Chairman, President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

This new online training was produced by the interagency Federal Employee/Workforce Native Education and Training workgroup. A subcommittee of the Indian Affairs Executive Working Group, it identified the need for a primer available to all federal employees charged with the important responsibility of working with Indian tribes.

"The training is rich with information - respectful of the rich historical and cultural heritage the tribes we are working with - which will better prepare government employees who collaborate with Native American/Alaska Native communities," said EPA Administrator Johnson.

"The public safety of our Nation's citizens is paramount to our mission and we are pleased to partner with our fellow federal agencies to develop a training program that helps all of us work more effectively with tribal governments," said Jeffrey L. Sedgwick, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs.

EPA, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Department of Justice developed the online training with support from numerous agencies including the Department of the Interior, Forest Service, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, the General Services Administration, the Department of Energy and the Small Business Administration. The training is hosted by the Office of Personnel Management.

The training modules within the course include "Introduction to Tribal Concepts," which covers concepts essential to understanding the unique political status of federally recognized Indian tribes--such as tribal sovereignty, the government-to-government relationship and the federal trust responsibility. It also contains information on Native American demographics, and explains tribal land status and the definition of "Indian Country."

The "Federal Indian Law and Policy" module outlines the history of tribal-federal relations, explains the complex issues of jurisdiction in Indian Country and provides links to various federal statutes that pertain to Indian tribes.

The last module, "Cultural Orientation and Tips for Working More Effectively with Tribal Governments," provides essential cultural information that can greatly increase the quality of cross-cultural communications.

Program oversight in the development of the on-line training was provided by the President's eTraining Initiative, an e-Government initiative managed by OPM. Technical assistance was provided by GoLearn.gov, a training service provider that offers a wide range of e-Learning products and services.

"As demonstrated by the modules developed for this program, the President's eTraining initiative provides the infrastructure, processes, and expertise needed to develop and deliver world-class on-line training," according to Karen Evans, Administrator of E-Government and Information Technology.