

## **Secretary Salazar Announces Next Stage in Developing Department-Wide Tribal Consultation Policy**

Secretary Ken Salazar recently announced that the Department of the Interior has moved to the next stage in its plan of actions to develop a department-wide tribal nations consultation policy by constituting a Tribal Consultation Team. The team will consist of 12 tribal officials and alternates representing federally recognized tribes in each Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) region along with representatives from each DOI Bureau or Office. Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry EchoHawk notified tribal leaders by letter on March 23 and requested nominations.

“I am pleased to announce that we have reached the next stage in the Interior Department’s plan of actions to establish a comprehensive, department-wide policy on tribal consultation,” Salazar said. “Now that the department is ready to establish the consultation team that will draft the new policy, I want to underscore the importance and urgency of responding to the call for tribal nominations so that we can move forward expeditiously.”

The tribes in each BIA region are asked to nominate three tribal officials or delegates from their BIA region to serve on the tribal consultation team and submit their nominees to the BIA Regional Director by April 30, 2010. Regional Directors will work with the tribes to select the nominees and provide any technical assistance, if needed. Regional Directors will forward nominations to the Secretary by May 5. The Secretary will appoint one tribal member and one alternative from each BIA region to the team, as well as one federal member and one alternative from each Interior Bureau/Office by May 14.

Team members will have several months to draft the consultation policy, which will involve the review and evaluation of existing functions, policies, procedures and practices that have tribal implications and require ongoing review and comments from the tribes and general public on the draft policy. Once the first draft of the policy is developed the consultation team will submit the draft policy to the tribes and publish it in the Federal Register for public comment.

The Interior Department’s plan of actions was developed as directed by President Obama in his memorandum, to imple-

ment Executive Order 13175 dated November 6, 2000, Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments. The executive order directs executive branch departments and agencies to develop policies on tribal consultation and cooperation. The President signed the memorandum at the White House Tribal Nations Summit held at the Interior Department’s headquarters in Washington, D.C., on November 5, 2009.

On November 23, 2009, the department invited tribal leaders to participate in a series of tribal consultation meetings to discuss their experiences with federal consultation efforts, provide suggestions on a departmental plan, and make recommendations on improving its consultation practices. Meetings were held in seven cities from December 2009 through January 2010. Approximately 300 tribal representatives and over 250 officials from and other federal agencies attended the meetings to hear the tribes’ ideas and concerns.

On February 22, 2010, Secretary Salazar announced the Interior Department’s plan to establish a comprehensive, department-wide policy for meaningful consultation with the nation’s 564 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes in accordance with its legal obligations and in fulfillment of its trust responsibilities.

After the draft consultation policy has been circulated to tribes and tribal organizations for review and comment, the department will publish the revised draft in the Federal Register with a 60-day comment period. Following the department’s publishing of the final consultation policy within 90 days of the close of the comment period, the Secretary will issue a Secretarial Order directing all Interior bureaus and offices to comply with the department-wide policy and its guiding principles.

The letter to tribal leaders dated March 22, 2010, along with a copy of the Interior Department plan and the Tribal Consultation Team nomination form may be viewed via the DOI website at [http://www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/upload/Mar\\_22\\_2010-Tribal\\_Leader\\_Letter.pdf](http://www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/upload/Mar_22_2010-Tribal_Leader_Letter.pdf).

## **President Obama Donates Nobel Prize Money to Charity, Including \$125,000 to the American Indian College Fund**

President Obama announced the charities that will receive a portion of the \$1.4 million award that comes with the Nobel peace prize. “These organizations do extraordinary work in the United States and abroad helping students, veterans and countless others in need,” said President Obama. “I’m proud to support their work.

The list of charities includes: \$250,000 to Fisher House, \$200,000 to the Clinton-Bush Haiti Fund, \$125,000 to College Summit, \$125,000 to the Posse Foundation, \$125,000 to the United Negro College Fund, \$125,000 to the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, \$125,000 to the Appalachian Leadership and Education Foundation, \$125,000 to the American Indian

College Fund, \$100,000 to AfriCare, and \$100,000 to the Central Asia Institute.

The American Indian College Fund transforms Indian higher education by funding and creating awareness of the unique, community-based accredited tribal colleges and universities, offering students access to knowledge, skills, and cultural values which enhance their communities and the country as a whole. The fund disburses approximately 6,000 scholarships annually for American Indian students seeking to better their lives through higher education. The fund also provides support for tribal college needs, ranging from capital support to cultural preservation curricula.

## **Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Announces Funding to Improve Transportation, Generate Economic Opportunity in Rural and Native American Communities**

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced that USDA has selected the Community Transportation Association of America to receive grant funding that will be used to help bring transportation improvements to rural areas in seven states.

"We know that areas with strong transportation systems attract and retain businesses and improve the quality of life in rural towns," Vilsack said. "These grants from USDA will help Native American communities in three states improve existing local passenger transportation systems. One of the best ways to rebuild rural communities is to improve the transportation infrastructure because doing so often has a catalytic effect in creating economic growth."

The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) was selected to receive \$750,000 in grants to provide technical assistance to organizations in their efforts to enhance passenger transportation service in rural areas and rural Native American communities and improve modes of transportation in those areas.

Of the \$750,000, \$500,000 will be used to assist organizations in Alaska (Rural areas surrounding Fairbanks); Illinois (Warren and Henderson Counties); Maine (Cumberland County); and New Jersey (Cape May). The remaining \$250,000 will be used to assist several Native American communities and tribal organizations with transportation improvements and planning in Mississippi (The Mississippi Band of Choctaw in Neshoba County); New Mexico (The Pueblo of Acoma) and (The Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo); and

Oklahoma (Roger Mills, Dewey, Custer, Washita, Blaine, Canadian and Kingfisher Counties).

USDA's Rural Business Enterprise Grant program continues to bring economic opportunity to rural citizens. One recent successful undertaking involved a project that benefited the Oglala Sioux Tribe based in Pineridge, S.D. Plagued by high unemployment, isolation and other social issues, the tribe received assistance from a 2002 study that was conducted by the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) to develop a transit and facility plan. CTAA worked with a consultant to develop a decentralized, fixed-route transit system designed to serve the tribe's 42,000 members who live on the reservation. Since service on the system began last year, it has helped reduce pedestrian-related accidents, while increasing employment opportunities and access to education and human services for tribal members of all ages. The transit system includes a full service maintenance facility and administration offices, along with vehicles and satellite facilities.

The funding for this program is administered through USDA Rural Development's Rural Business Enterprise Grant program (RBEG). It will be provided for projects where at least three-quarters of the benefits will be received by members of a federally recognized tribe. The beneficiary of the project may also be a tribally owned business venture. Funding is contingent upon the recipient meeting the conditions of the grant agreement. These funds are not from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

## **EPA Announces the New Office of International and Tribal Affairs**

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa P. Jackson, who has highlighted strengthening tribal partnerships as a top priority during her tenure, recently announced an internal restructuring that brings EPA's international and tribal programs together under one umbrella organization called the Office of International & Tribal Affairs (OITA). This restructuring was initiated in response to a request from the tribes to reconsider the proper location of the American Indian Environmental Office (AIEO).

"This change ensures that we approach our relationship with the sovereign tribal nations within our own country in the same way we approach our relationship with sovereign nations beyond U.S. borders," said Administrator Jackson, "I am confident this move will result in new and positive directions for the EPA-Tribal partnership."

In early 2009, Administrator Jackson met with the National Congress of American Indians and announced her intention to review the American Indian Environmental Office's (AIEO) placement in the EPA structure. After consultation with the National Tribal Caucus and EPA leadership in July 2009, she announced the restructuring that would move AIEO from the Office of Water to the Office of International Affairs, and rename the office to reflect the inclusion.

"Tribes and tribal lands face disproportionate environmental and public health concerns" said Michelle DePass, Assistant Administrator for the new OITA. "It is my honor to assume leadership of the American Indian Environmental Office – and I look forward to working with tribal communities as partners in overall efforts to address these pressing issues."

The President's 2011 budget request for the Agency includes a \$41.4 million increase in tribal funding across the country, of which \$30 million is targeted for new multi-media tribal grants. This new grant program will be tailored to address individual tribes' most serious environmental needs through the implementation of environmental programs, and will help tribes address their environmental priorities to the fullest extent possible. In addition, a 24 percent increase of \$2.9 million is proposed to support new staff positions to oversee, provide guidance, and ensure accountability for the new grant program. An additional \$8.5 million is provided for General Assistance Program grants, which can be put towards programs and projects ranging from assistance for enforcement and compliance activities to education and job training, a 13 percent increase over final Fiscal Year 2010 budget levels.