



# Pawnee Nation Communications

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## **ASST SEC OF INDIAN AFFAIRS MEETS WITH TRIBAL LEADERS**

Pawnee, Okla., October 26, 2009— Friday, October 23, Assistant Secretary- Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk met with approximately 40 Oklahoma and Kansas tribal leaders about the issues they face within Indian Country.

Echo Hawk was honored by the Pawnee Nation, Pawnee Nation College, City of Pawnee and State of Oklahoma, with each proclaiming October 23, “Larry Echo Hawk Day.”

Echo Hawk was presented with Native American issues concerning water rights, higher education, youth, gaming, and land into trust.

Although Echo Hawk was there to listen, he did get the chance to address tribal leaders and citizens about the difficult decision of accepting the position of Assistant Secretary- Indian Affairs.

He said he was called by President Barack Obama's transition team after the presidential election and that after meeting with then-Senator Ken Salazar — who would later be confirmed as Secretary of the Interior — and being offered the job, he hesitated.

"I did not seek this position," Echo Hawk told the group. "He (Salazar) used the right words when he asked me. He said, 'Your country is calling you into service.' "

While trying to decide about the position, he met with former Assistant Secretary, Kevin Gover, who is also a Pawnee tribal member. Gover told him it was the most difficult job he'd ever had, but it was also the most satisfying thing he'd ever done in his life.

In the last eight years, there have been six different people serve in the position of Assistant Secretary- Indian Affairs. Once learning this, Echo Hawk said, “Indian Country deserved better than that.”

"I knew by accepting that position, if I were confirmed by the United States Senate, I would become the face of the federal government in Indian Country," Echo Hawk said.

"I hesitated because the federal government in its relations to native people has some very dark chapters, some dark chapters in American history."

While still trying to decide whether or not to accept the job, Echo Hawk re-read "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West," by Dee Brown.

The book was about military campaigns during 1860 and 1890, the military actions launched against Native Americans to remove them from their homelands, said Echo Hawk. I wanted to re-read that book to get together the perspective I would need in assuming the responsibilities. Though this book had many dark chapters in the lives of Native Americans, I knew of many more, he said.

"Do you see why I would hesitate to become the face of the federal government?" Echo Hawk asked, his voice choking with emotion.

"I only want to do what is right and just in this position. It is not enough for me to be a good and honorable trustee. I desire to be an agent of change."

"I said yes because I think there's a chance to do something that's never been done before."

Echo Hawk was then honored with a standing ovation.

"I'm going to give it all I can. I know I'm going to make mistakes. I won't be perfect. But I want you to know, I will always try to do the very best of my ability to do what is right and just. And I ask for forgiveness. Many of the decisions I will make are tribe versus tribe. I'm going to disappoint someone. I will disappoint someone that I love. When I make those decisions all I can promise you is I will do my best," said Echo Hawk

At the conclusion of the public session, Echo Hawk met privately with tribal leaders for a round table discussion that was closed to the media and the public.

The conference can be viewed at [www.ustream.tv/channel/Pawnee-Nation-Live](http://www.ustream.tv/channel/Pawnee-Nation-Live).

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