Secretary Jewell Commends Senate’s Confirmation of Jonodev Chaudhuri as Chair of the National Indian Gaming Commission

Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell applauded the recent Senate confirmation of Jonodev Osceola Chaudhuri to be Chair of the National Indian Gaming Commission, the federal agency tasked with collaborating with tribes and states to regulate Indian gaming. The President nominated Chaudhuri in July 2014.

“Jonodev will be an outstanding chair of the National Indian Gaming Commission,” Secretary Jewell said. “Having served on the Commission, in tribal government and private practice Indian law, his experience and expertise will enable him to provide strong strategic leadership as the commission tackles the complex issues associated with supporting economic opportunities for Indian nations.”

The National Indian Gaming Commission (NIGC) is committed to the prompt and efficient regulation of the Indian gaming industry, which spans more than 420 gaming establishments, associated with nearly 240 tribes across 28 states. The Commission’s dedication to compliance with the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act ensures the integrity of the $27 billion Indian gaming industry

Chaudhuri most recently served as the Vice Chairman and Associate Commissioner of the NIGC, positions he held since 2013. He also served as Acting Chairman of the NIGC from 2013 to April 2014. Before that Chaudhuri was Senior Counselor to the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior from 2012 to 2013. He served as an Associate Judge on the Puyallup Tribe of Nations Court from 2011 to 2012, an Appellate Judge on the San Manuel Mission Band of Indians Appeals Court from 2009 to 2012 and an Appellate Judge on the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Supreme Court from 2006 to 2012.

The NIGC was established by the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988 and comprises a chair and two commissioners, each of whom serves on a full-time basis for a three-year term. By law, at least two of the three commissioners must be enrolled members of a federally recognized Indian tribe, and no more than two members may be of the same political party. The chair is appointed by the President and must be confirmed by the Senate. The Secretary of the Interior appoints the other two commissioners.

The NIGC’s primary mission is to regulate gaming activities on Indian lands for the purpose of shielding Indian tribes from organized crime and other corrupting influences. The independent Commission also works to ensure that Indian tribes are the primary beneficiaries of gaming revenue and that gaming is conducted fairly and honestly by both operators and players. To achieve these goals, the commission is authorized to conduct investigations and undertake enforcement actions, including the issuance of notices of violation, assessment of civil fines, and/or issuance of closure orders, audits, reviews and approval of tribal gaming ordinances.

Interior Department, Navajo Nation Partner to Implement Land Buy-Back Program

Interior Deputy Secretary Michael Connor recently announced that the Department has entered a cooperative agreement with the Navajo Nation to further implement the Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations (Buy-Back Program). The agreement outlines the strategy and resources to be provided to the tribe’s leadership to facilitate education about the Buy-Back Program and reach out to owners with fractionated interests in reservation land that can be consolidated for the benefit of the tribal community. There are approximately 245,000 owners of nearly three million fractional interests across Indian Country who are eligible to participate in the Buy-Back Program. Many see little or no economic benefit from what are often small, undivided interests in lands that cannot be utilized due to their highly fractionated state. The Buy-Back Program facilitates the purchase of individual interests in fractionated trust lands and consolidates ownership for the tribe with jurisdiction.

“The vastness of the Navajo Nation and the number of native speakers make close coordination with the tribal government and staff especially important to ensure landowners have the information they need to make informed decisions about their land,” said Deputy Secretary Connor. “The Buy-Back Program is an exceptional opportunity that cannot be taken for granted. We appreciate the dedication and hard work of the Navajo Nation leadership and staff in finalizing this agreement with us, and we look forward to continued collaboration as we work together on this unique initiative.”

Tribes have the opportunity to actively participate in the Buy-Back Program, including identifying acquisition priorities and leading owner outreach. The Department has entered into cooperative or other agreements with nearly 20 sovereign tribal nations. Each cooperative agreement between the Program and individual tribes is unique in time, scope and responsibilities based on the expressed interests of the tribe.

“The Navajo Nation is excited to implement the Land Buy-Back Program,” said Navajo President Ben Shelly. “We see this not only as an opportunity to consolidate tribal lands, but to strengthen relations with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U.S. Department of Interior. We must move fast with the one-year rollout period for the program.”

The Buy-Back Program was created to implement the land consolidation component of the Cobell Settlement, which provided $1.9 billion to consolidate fractional land interests across Indian Country. It allows interested individual owners to receive payments for voluntarily selling their land. Interested sellers receive payments directly into their Individual Indian Money (IIM) account, and consolidated interests are immediately transferred to tribal governments and stay in trust for uses benefiting the tribes and their members. ♦