

News Release

National American Indian Housing Council

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Interior Secretary Nominee Needs To Be Clear on Indian Issues; Solid Relationship with Tribes is Promising for Interior

WASHINGTON—March 27, 2006— The National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC) congratulates Gov. Dirk Kempthorne on his nomination as Interior Secretary and is encouraged by his positive relationship with tribes as the governor of Idaho. NAIHC hopes that this will translate into a positive government-to-government relationship with tribes across the country as they work towards their self-determined goals for quality affordable housing and other needs.

President Bush nominated Kempthorne to the Interior Department Secretary position on March 16, to replace current Secretary Gale Norton, who announced her resignation March 10 after 5 years in the position. The Senate must confirm Kempthorne, however no hearing date has been announced. During the Senate confirmation process it is important to look at Indian issues, including housing. The **Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)** is one of the largest bureaus within Interior and impacts the quality of life for more than two million Native Americans, say NAIHC leaders.

“Overall needs of Native Americans remain unmet, such as basic infrastructure in their communities, quality affordable housing, education and health care,” said NAIHC Chairman **Chester Carl**. “As 12% of Native Americans lack plumbing facilities, 11% lack kitchen facilities, 90,000 Native families are homeless or under-housed and 14.7% of homes are overcrowded, the Interior Department Secretary must be ready to take on these challenges.”

BIA Head Should Be Appointed Quickly

As head of Interior NAIHC hopes Kempthorne would nominate a new Deputy Secretary for the BIA quickly. This position has been vacant for more than a year. A new BIA head would help to implement the Title Status Report (TSR) Policy MOU that is intended to expedite mortgage transactions on tribal trust land, producing many benefits for Indian housing. The MOU guarantees that a BIA staff person will be able to certify TSRs within 30 days.

Kempthorne Has Solid Reputation with Tribes in Idaho

As governor, Kempthorne has collaborated with tribes on gaming compacts, signed agreements to recognize tribal sovereignty, water rights and other disputes. NAIHC hopes that this collaboration and understanding of tribal sovereignty will continue into the Interior position.

“If confirmed, Gov. Kempthorne will be responsible for honoring tribal sovereignty and respecting the need for consultation and collaboration in Indian country on all issues,” said NAIHC Executive Director **Gary Gordon**. “This includes collaborating with the Housing and Urban Development department and tribes on the sometimes deeply disturbing realities of housing and infrastructure needs in Indian country.”

The **Coeur d’Alene Tribe** in Idaho issued a statement last week stating that Gov. Kempthorne is fit to be the Interior Secretary. “Coeur d’Alene has constructed a solid foundation working with Gov. Kempthorne on a wide range of issues including gaming and environmental concerns,” said Quanah Spencer, Legislative and Public Affairs Director. The tribe’s chairman, **Chief J. Allan**, “hopes to continue that relationship, the trustee relationship with tribes firmly at the center.”

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The National American Indian Housing Council (www.naihc.net) assists tribes and tribal housing entities in reaching their self-determined goals of providing culturally relevant, decent, safe, sanitary, and quality affordable housing for Native people in Indian communities and Alaska Native villages.