



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUGUST 21, 2009

CONTACT: GEORGE HARDEEN
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
OFFICE – 928-871-7917
CELL – 928-309-8532
pressoffice@opvp.org

Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., welcomes top Interior officials, proclaims 'Hilary C. Tompkins Day' to welcome home new Solicitor

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and Vice President Ben Shelly welcomed Interior Secretary Kenneth Salazar, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Larry EchoHawk and Interior Department Solicitor Hilary Tompkins to the Navajo Nation on Thursday.

The President expressed his appreciation to the three top Interior officials for coming to Navajoland for an unprecedented four-hour long meeting, tour, press conference and dinner with Navajo leaders.

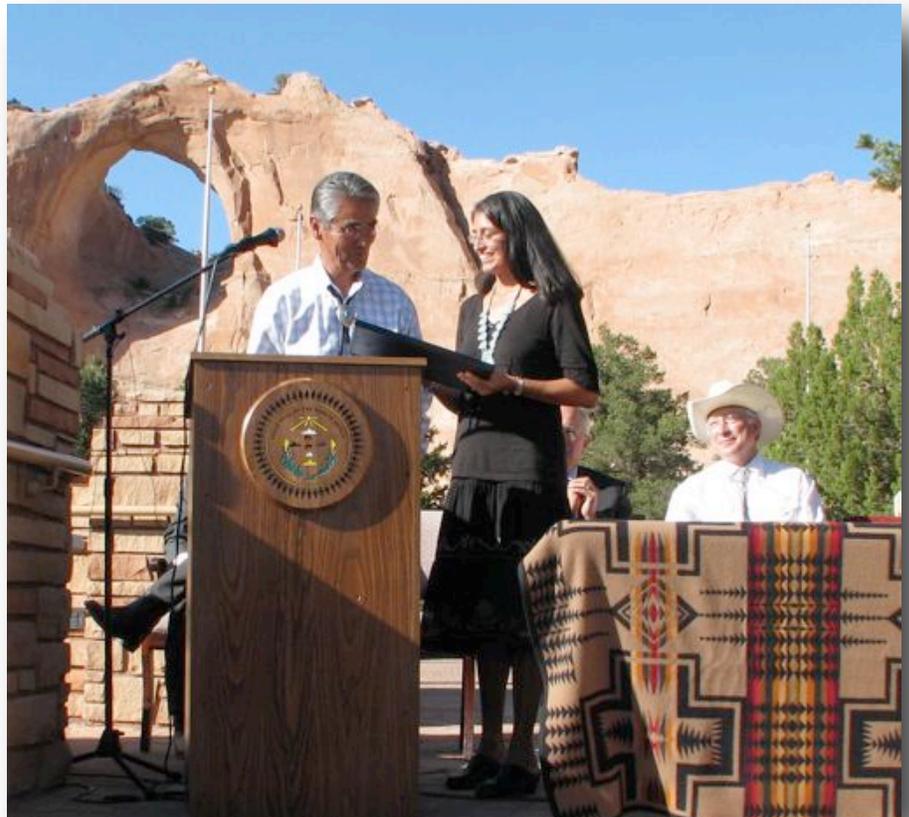
“This is the first time three principals from the Interior Department are here on Navajoland all at the same time giving this much time to us,” he said. “On behalf of the Navajo Nation, my people, my government, thank you very much for being here. This is really giving quality time to our people, our elderly, our leadership.”

President Shirley also extended an invitation to President Barack Obama to visit the Navajo Nation and to enjoy “the breakfast of champions; mutton stew, fry bread and coffee.”

President Shirley greeted Secretary Salazar and Solicitor Tompkins at their arrival to the Navajo Nation Council Chambers. Assistant Secretary EchoHawk arrived earlier and was meeting with the Council’s Intergovernmental Relations Committee when the Secretary and Solicitor joined them for 30 minutes.

Following a tour of the Hunter’s Point Bureau of Indian Affairs School, President Shirley proclaimed “Hilary C. Tompkins Day on the Navajo Nation” to welcome home

and honor a Navajo daughter whom he described as one of the highest-ranking officials in the federal government.



Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., presents Interior Solicitor Hilary Tompkins with a proclamation proclaiming Aug. 20, 2009, as “Hilary C. Tompkins Day on the Navajo Nation.”

“We are proud to welcome back one of our own,” President Shirley said. “The Navajo people always encourage their young to work hard, get educated, and come back to help their people. Hilary has done that and has gone beyond. She has worked, studied, struggled, and now is in one of the highest offices in the land. She came back to help her people with the Navajo Nation Department of Justice, went on to work for New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, and now she’s been called to serve the nation and all Native Americans by the

President of the United States. The Navajo people could not be more proud of one of our daughters.”

The President presented Ms. Tompkins with a Ganado Red Navajo rug and a framed proclamation declaring “Hilary C. Tompkins Day.” He said she is the first Native American and second woman to hold the position of solicitor at the Interior Department.

other contracts with Congress, federal agencies, states, tribes and the public.

Ms. Tompkins said she was raised by adoptive parents in New Jersey who always told her she would return to her land and her people.



Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., greets Interior Secretary Ken Salazar upon his arrival to the Navajo Nation.

“Our grandparents have always told us “*T’áá hó ájit’éegó*” – “It’s up to you” – and Hilary’s life beautifully exemplifies this sacred and empowering teaching,” the proclamation reads. “The Navajo People have a sense of renewed hope, joyful anticipation, and great appreciation of the promise of a new President, and in the trust he has placed in one of our own. The Navajo Nation is extremely proud of Hilary for her accomplishments, and honors her for the work she has done, and will do, on behalf of all Native Nations, and for the United States of America.”

Ms. Tompkins was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as Solicitor of the Department of the Interior on June 17, 2009. As Solicitor, she is the chief general counsel for Interior and represents the department in administrative and judicial litigation and meetings, negotiations and

After graduating from Dartmouth College, she came to the Navajo Nation to work as a law clerk for the Navajo Nation Supreme Court in Window Rock in the early 1990s. She also worked for the Navajo Nation Department of Justice as a tribal court advocate after passing the Navajo Nation bar exam, and was encouraged to go to law school.

She obtained her law degree from Stanford University where she was associate editor of the Stanford Law Review.

Before becoming Solicitor, Ms. Tompkins served as an adjunct professor at the University of New Mexico School of Law. From 2003 to 2008, she was chief counsel to New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson.

During the Clinton administration, Ms. Tompkins served as an honors program trial lawyer in the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Ms. Tompkins said she wanted to thank Navajo leaders and the Navajo Nation for being able to go to college with the help of a Chief Manuelito Scholarship and being given a chance in life. That led her to following a dream of coming to the Navajo Nation for the first time to learn about her people, culture, language and way of life.

While working for the Department of Justice, her boss was Navajo Nation Supreme Court Chief Justice Herb Yazzie, who was then attorney general. She said the people she met were instrumental in her going to law school.

"They gave me the encouragement I needed to keep on my life path," she said.

Secretary Salazar said he recognizes in Ms. Tompkins the qualities and values that could enable her to someday be a U.S. Supreme Court justice or President of the United States. The Navajo Nation, through the scholarship program, gave her a chance to get a college education, he said.

"Somehow and some way that imprinted in her heart a desire to serve, not only her people of the Navajo Nation but the Native people of this nation," he said.

He said it's an honor for him to be Secretary of the Interior under Barack Obama.

"One of the things that he and I talked about was the importance of the first Americans of the United States and making sure that a sad time of our history in our past would be welcomed by a new beginning and a page where we would have the kind of government-to-government relationships that would truly respect the foundations of the relationships that should exist between Indian Country and the United States of America," he said.

He said he wanted to choose the best of the best, and that in his selection for Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Larry EchoHawk was that choice.

Mr. EchoHawk, a Pawnee, said he was raised in Farmington, N.M., from age 1 through high school.

"The EchoHawk family is closely tied to Navajoland, and it feels good to be back," he said.

Prior to becoming Assistant Secretary, Mr. EchoHawk was a law professor at Brigham Young University's J. Reuben Clark Law School. His 35-year law career

includes experience in legal aid services, federal Indian law, private practice, and public service as a tribal attorney, county prosecutor and, following his election in 1990, attorney general for the state of Idaho.

The Assistant Secretary is responsible for helping the Interior Secretary fulfill his trust responsibilities to tribal and individual trust beneficiaries and promoting self-determination and self-governance for the nation's 562 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Natives.

The Assistant Secretary oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education, which administers one of two federal school systems.

"We want to change the world, and we want to change the world for the betterment of all Americans," Secretary Salazar said. "In particular, we want to that have been legion for decade after decade that have affected Indian Country, that we affect



Secretary Salazar and President Shirley walk to a press conference on the step to the Navajo Nation Veterans Memorial Park in front of the President's office on Thursday.

those in a positive and proactive way."

"Our challenge today is to make sure we are looking at economic opportunities or economic development because even as we face an economic crisis in the United States of America today, many in Indian Country know that that economic crisis is not one that's happened in the last two years but it's been a crisis that has been here forever," he said.

###