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Tribal Nations Highlight Successes in Face of Increasing Challenges During USET Sovereignty Protection Fund Impact Week

(Washington, DC)— In opening remarks at the United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF) Impact Week, President Kirk Francis stressed the importance of unity and of holding the United States accountable in fulfilling its trust and treaty obligations in Indian Country.

Throughout the week, Tribal leaders from 27 Tribal Nations across the south and eastern United States will discuss important topics such as protecting Tribal Nation homelands, constitutionality threats and challenges, reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, and protecting sovereign immunity in Indian Country.

“We find ourselves in a moment of Tribal Nation – United States relations where we must be steadfast in our unity and resolved to do everything in our power to ensure that we are in the best position to protect and promote our inherent sovereign authorities,” said Francis.

The morning welcome included the posting of colors and a blessing of the new eagle staff. In native culture, eagles and their feathers are considered sacred and represent the unwavering strength and spirit of Native Americans. The new eagle staff is more emblematic of the vision of USET SPF and the unity of the 27 USET member Tribal Nations.

This year is the 50th anniversary of protecting and promoting inherent sovereign rights and authorities of USET member Tribal Nations. As stated by President Francis—

Because there is Strength in Unity

“For 50 years, we have worked tirelessly to represent the united interests of Tribal Nations from the south and east and have sought to promote your common welfare and benefit. We have done so with a fundamental understanding, respect, and honor for the vision of our founders and the strength that we derive from our unity.”

Recognizing the importance of unity, fifty years ago four Tribal Nations organized United Southeastern Tribes, Inc., which later became United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc. We are thankful to these four visionary Tribal Nations— the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the Miccosukee Band of Indians of Florida, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, the Seminole Tribe of Florida-- for providing the foundation for what we have become today.

USET/USET SPF is a recognized leader in Indian Country because of the persistence, honesty, forward thinking, accountability, and dedication that each of you bring to the effort. With the current political climate of divisiveness and negativity, it is more important than ever to carry out the vision reflected in our motto, “Because there is Strength in Unity.”

We will continue working together not only for the benefit of USET member Tribal Nations, but for the collective good of all Tribal citizens. For example, there will be a joint Capitol Hill reception on Wednesday with the Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes (MAST), an intertribal organization of 35 Tribal Nations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Iowa.

Another example of the efforts of USET to forge broad inter-regional relationships across Indian Country were the opening remarks by Chairman Harold Frazier, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, on behalf of the Great Plains Tribal Chairman’s Association.

Chairman Frazier is a strong advocate not only for his Tribal Nation, but for the Great Plains region and Indian Country overall. He recognizes the importance of unity, the importance of all Tribal Nations working together to identify areas of common ground.

Frazier was first elected to the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Council in 1998 and was elected Tribal Chairman 2002 – 2006. He was re-elected in 2014. From 2000 to 2006, Frazier served as the Great Plains Area Vice President to the National Congress of American Indians. USET presented to Chairman Frazier a traditional basket and braid of sweet grass.

Because there is Strength in Unity

By working together, our respective regions and organizations can demonstrate the power of partnership through respectful diplomatic relations between Tribal Nations and the United States, through social justice as the shared foundation for our advocacy, through fulfillment of trust and treaty obligations as our shared goal, and through doing everything possible to protect and promote our inherent sovereign authorities and rights. There may be some issues that we disagree on, but we will always share more issues in common, and therefore must commit ourselves to working together to be more effective in resolving these common issues.

USET SPF was honored with opening remarks by Representative Deb Haaland (D-New Mexico, 1st Congressional District). USET SPF presented to Rep. Haaland a traditional basket and braid of sweet grass.

Rep. Haaland is one of the two first female Native Americans elected to the U.S. Congress (Rep. Sharice Davids, D-Kansas). She is a citizen of the Laguna Pueblo. Prior to serving in Congress, she served as the Democratic Chair in New Mexico, from 2015 to 2017. She has been most gracious with her time since being elected in 2018 and has taken time to listen to the priorities presented by Indian Country.

Rep. Haaland is a champion of Native American issues. Based on her remarks, we are confident that she will be a strong advocate for Indian Country, ensuring that our interests have consistent visibility while holding the United States accountable for its trust and treaty obligations.

Also this morning, for the first time, the USET SPF Board of Directors met with Tara Sweeney, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs. The board discussed important issues with Assistant Secretary Sweeney, including protecting Tribal lands and priorities for 2019.

USET Impact Week is taking place Monday through Thursday, March 4-7, at the Marriott Crystal Gateway in Arlington, VA, and on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.¹

¹USET SPF is a 501(c)(4) organization that focuses on educating Congress and the Executive Branch regarding issues challenging Indian Country, and advocating for the policy and legislative needs of its member Tribal Nations. During Impact Week, Tribal Nations renew efforts to promote and protect the inherent sovereign authority of Tribal Nations.



USET Eagle Staff



L-R: USET SPF Treasurer B Cheryl Smith (Chief, Jena Band of Choctaw), USET SPF Secretary Lynn Many Hearts Malerba (Chief, Mohegan Tribe of Connecticut), Chairman Harold Frazier (Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe), USET SPF President Kirk Francis (Chief, Penobscot Indian Nation)



Representative Deb Haaland (D-NM) with USET Tribal Leaders

Because there is Strength in Unity