



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
Washington DC 20420

March 1, 2011

Dear Tribal Leader:

We are writing to announce three important milestones occurring within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Office of Tribal Government Relations (OTGR), in compliance with the policies and directives of Executive Order 13175, has been officially established and has a permanent director. Ms. Stephanie Elaine Birdwell, an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, was hired on January 31, 2011. Ms. Birdwell is responsible for creating an office that, on a government-to-government basis, works in consultation and collaboration with tribal governments to plan, strategize, build consensus, share best practices and work together to ensure services are delivered to American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans in a manner that is both responsive and resourceful to the particular circumstances, needs and concerns of tribal governments.

The next milestone achieved is the VA Tribal Consultation Policy. The Policy was signed by Secretary Eric Shinseki on February 4, 2011. This historic document was drafted in consultation with 565 federally recognized Tribes. It is considered a "living document," one that can be revised and amended as needed.

The third milestone is the MOU between the Indian Health Service and the Department of Veterans Affairs. The MOU was signed by Dr. Robert A. Petzel, Under Secretary for Health, Department of Veterans Affairs and Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, Director, Indian Health Service, on October 10, 2010. This MOU replaces and supersedes the MOU signed by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Health and Human Services on February 25, 2003. Copies of both documents are available on the VA website www.va.gov/tribalgovernment.

The OTGR staff will be building upon existing relationships with key personnel across the VA (Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration and the National Cemetery Administration), partnership groups, state agencies and most importantly, reaching out to visit tribal leadership across the country to engage in an ongoing dialogue about the needs and concerns tribal governments have regarding access to services and benefits available to American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans. The OTGR director and staff look forward to meeting with you in the very near future.

You can e-mail any inquiries to tribalgovernmentconsultation@va.gov or call us at (202) 461-7400.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Duckworth".

L. Tammy Duckworth

Sincerely,
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Stephanie E. Birdwell".

Stephanie E. Birdwell
Director, Office of Tribal Government Relations