

*Washington, DC* - The head of the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs has accepted Congressman Maurice Hinchey's (D-NY) invitation to visit Sullivan County in the coming weeks to tour potential off-reservation gaming sites. The congressman extended the invitation to Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Larry EchoHawk last Friday. A specific date for an August visit is currently being worked out.

"Assistant Secretary EchoHawk has agreed to visit Sullivan County where he can see firsthand how off-reservation gaming could benefit the local economy and help to revive the region's tourism and hospitality industry," Hinchey said. "Casino gaming in Sullivan County could provide a real shot in the arm to the area's economy by creating thousands of new jobs, including construction jobs and permanent positions at the facilities. I look forward to showing Assistant Secretary EchoHawk around Sullivan County and helping to facilitate a positive outcome for efforts to secure approval of off-reservation gaming."

Earlier this year, Hinchey questioned Interior Secretary Ken Salazar about the Obama administration's position on off-reservation Indian gaming. The secretary told Hinchey that he planned on making a review of off-reservation gaming a high priority once the Senate confirmed an Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs. EchoHawk was confirmed for that position just one week later. The last Interior Secretary during the Bush administration, Dirk Kempthorne, opposed off-reservation gaming.

With a new administration in place, Hinchey has sought to gain understanding for off-reservation casino operations in Sullivan County. It's expected that the administration will come out with its position on the matter this fall.