

Department of Homeland Security and Seneca Nation of Indians Announce Agreement to Develop Enhanced Tribal Card



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Office of the Press Secretary

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The Department of Homeland Security and the Seneca Nation of Indians today formalized an agreement to develop a Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI)-compliant Enhanced Tribal Card (ETC)—signed by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Assistant Commissioner Thomas S. Winkowski and Seneca Nation President Barry E. Snyder, Sr., at a ceremony at Liberty Park in Niagara Falls, N.Y.

The ETC establishes identity, tribal membership and citizenship for the purpose of entering the United States by land or sea—enhancing safety and security of U.S. borders while facilitating legitimate travel and trade.

“This agreement will strengthen safety along our borders while providing Seneca Nation members a secure and standardized ID card,” said Secretary Napolitano. “In the months ahead, we will continue to build upon these efforts—from secure identification to preparing for emergencies—with our tribal partners across the country.”

“The Seneca Nation has occupied these lands in what we now call Western New York and Southern Ontario since time immemorial. We have crossed the waters that mark the border between the U.S. and Canada throughout history and we continue to cross the waters for a variety of traditional, governmental, commercial, cultural and social reasons,” said President Snyder. “This agreement is significant for several reasons, the most obvious of which is that it will not hinder our ability to cross the border. More importantly, this agreement stands in recognition of Seneca Nation sovereignty. This agreement demonstrates recognition of our sovereign right to develop our own Seneca Nation Tribal Identification cards, with enhanced features, that will be accepted by DHS and CBP for border crossing by our membership.”

The agreement represents Secretary Napolitano’s ongoing commitment to close coordination with tribal partners across the nation on security initiatives—and underscores the mutual commitment of DHS and the Seneca Nation to enhance border security and combat threats of terrorism and transnational crime through secure identification.

Since the beginning of the year, CBP has also signed agreements with the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho and the Pascua Yaqui of Arizona. CBP is currently working with approximately 25 additional tribes across the country on the ETC initiative.

In addition to partnering on secure identification, DHS is working with the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that tribal governments have critical information about how to prepare for and respond to the H1N1 flu. DHS coordinates with tribes, national and regional tribal associations and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to provide guidance on H1N1 readiness efforts for individuals, communities, businesses and schools.

WHTI is a joint initiative between DHS and the Department of State that implements a key 9/11 Commission recommendation and Congressional mandate to establish document requirements for travelers entering the United States who were previously exempt, including citizens of the United States, Canada and Bermuda.

DHS implemented WHTI at land and sea ports of entry on June 1, requiring travelers to present an approved travel document to enter the United States. Approved documents include passports, U.S. passport cards, trusted traveler program cards and state- or province-issued enhanced driver’s licenses. ETCs, developed in accordance with the signed agreement, will also be accepted for border crossings.

The Seneca Nation, one of the six nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, occupies aboriginal lands in western New York, including sovereign territories in Niagara Falls and Buffalo.

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