

Remarks by John Echohawk at the David H. Getches Memorial

August 11, 2011

I am John Echohawk, a citizen of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma. I am the Executive Director of the Native American Rights Fund, the national Indian legal defense, headquartered here in Boulder. David Getches was the founding Executive Director of the Native American Rights Fund in 1970 and started a legal revolution across Indian country. I was one of the first staff attorneys that he hired. There were not very many Native American attorneys around in those days but David understood the importance of Native American leadership in the organization. He was my mentor and supported me in becoming the Executive Director in 1973. Even then he continued on with the Native American Rights Fund until 1976 working as a staff attorney and making sure that I had all the advice and support that I needed to continue the success of the organization which has been so important to Native Americans across the country.

I am honored to also be here today as a representative of the Indian tribes across America. The National Congress of American Indians, the nation's oldest, largest and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization, has posthumously awarded David Getches the NCAI Lifetime Achievement Award. They asked me to give it to Ann Getches and the Getches family today. The President of NCAI, Jefferson Keel, said this about David: "He was an exceptional man. Across Indian Country, Mr. Getches will be remembered as a great friend and brother to Native people. NCAI extends our condolences to his family, friends and colleagues for this profound loss." Ann, can you come forward please and accept this Award?

The Award reads: "National Congress of American Indians Lifetime Achievement Award. David Getches, Founder of the Native American Rights Fund. Defender and Advocate for Tribal Sovereignty, Treaty Rights and the Federal Trust Responsibility. Your piercing intelligence, diligent work and compassion for the Native cause fostered a legal revolution and brought hope and justice to Indian communities nationwide. We thank you and lift you up in our hearts."