BOULDER, CO-It is with great sadness and with well wishes that NARF bids farewell to senior staff attorney Walter “Bunky” Echohawk. Walter will be retiring from NARF in April. He has served as an attorney for NARF since 1973 and has been a true pioneer and icon of Indian law. His contributions to the field are far too numerous to entirely mention. Walter has tirelessly served as a lawyer, tribal supreme court judge, scholar, writer and activist for more than 35 years. His legal experience includes cases involving Native American religious freedom, prisoner rights, water rights, treaty rights, and reburial/ repatriation rights.

Among Walter’s most important contributions to Native American rights was his involvement in the development and passage of The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), a Federal law passed in 1990. NAGPRA provides a process for museums and Federal agencies to return certain Native American cultural items-- human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony -- to lineal descendants, and culturally affiliated Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations.

Through his important work with NARF regarding NAGPRA and defending Native American religious freedom, Walter has literally helped to enable millions of Indian people to practice their religion(s) without fear of reprisal; enabled tribes to repatriate their loved ones’ remains from countless museums and private collections in order to give them the rest, peace and dignity they deserve, and has helped tribes secure their rights to use and protect their natural resources.

Other important contributions by Walter include his representation of the Native American Church of North America to secure passage of the American Indian Religious
Freedom Act Amendments of 1994 to protect religious use of peyote by Indians. Presently he represents the Klamath Tribes of Oregon to quantify treaty-protected water rights in Southern Oregon in a highly publicized and controversial set of federal and state litigation.

A prolific writer, his publications include an award-winning book Battlefields and Burial Grounds (1994). He has received various awards, such as, the American Bar Association “Spirit of Excellence Award” for legal work in the face of adversity and the “Civil Liberties Award” from the ACLU of Oregon for significant contributions in the cause of individual freedom. Since 1995, Walter has served as a member of the Carter Center’s International Human Rights Council. He is admitted to practice law before the United States Supreme Court, Colorado Supreme Court, U.S. Courts of Appeals for the Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Circuits, and a host of federal District Courts.

Walter is a member of the Pawnee Nation, belonging to the Kitkehaki Band, born on the Pawnee reservation in Oklahoma. Upon his retirement, he and his family will return to Oklahoma. Walter's new book, In the Courts of the Conqueror: The Ten Worst Indian Law Cases Ever Decided, will be published in 2010.

Words cannot express our gratitude to Walter for his many contributions to NARF and to all Native Americans. He is truly one of the greatest legal minds in the country and his work has impacted many past, present and future generations of Native Americans. Walter’s sense of humor, guidance, wisdom and unique sense of style will be missed by all here at NARF. Thank you Walter for all you have done. Your people are proud of you. Your relatives are proud of you, and the ones that have gone before us have looked down and I know they are proud of you. Thank you.