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**PUEBLO OF ACOMA**  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

**SACRED PUEBLO OBJECTS RETURN HOME AFTER  
MAJOR FEDERAL INVESTIGATION**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 19, 2018 - Pueblo of Acoma

The Pueblo of Acoma has waited years for the return of items considered extremely sacred to the tribe. They had been stolen, sold, and sent across the country before finding their way back to the traditional homelands of the Acoma People. Today, United States Attorney John C. Anderson along with Acoma Governor Kurt Riley announced the repatriation of a shield and several other important items of historic and cultural significance to the Pueblo of Acoma.

U.S. Attorney Anderson and Governor Riley participated in a repatriation ceremony earlier today with Special Agent Franklin Chavez of the Bureau of Indian Affairs who was instrumental in securing the items following a lengthy investigation. Other federal and Acoma tribal officials along with members of the Acoma Historic Preservation Office also attended the event at the Sky City Cultural Center and Haak'u Museum.

This ceremony marked the return of sacred objects and other cultural patrimony to Acoma. Federal and traditional Acoma laws prohibit the illegal trafficking of Native American cultural items. Such items are protected under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Anyone who knowingly sells, purchases, uses for profit, or transports for sale or profit any Native American cultural items, including sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony, or human remains, can be found guilty of a federal crime.

“The Pueblo of Acoma has been a vocal and strong advocate for the protection of sacred items and items of cultural patrimony illegally taken from tribal homelands,” said Acoma Governor Kurt Riley.

In 2015, the Pueblo of Acoma made a public appeal for the halting of the sale of a similar Acoma shield by the Eve Auction House in Paris, France. The Eve Auction house removed the shield from its sale, but currently possesses it in defiance of a United States District Court's warrant for its seizure. During the same time, the Pueblo of Acoma became significantly involved in identifying and referring for investigation items of Acoma cultural patrimony being sold in the United States. Today, over 25 items of cultural patrimony, including a different Acoma shield were voluntarily returned to the Pueblo.

"We have raised our voices internationally, in the halls of Congress and the legislative chambers here in New Mexico, drawing attention to the longstanding epidemic of theft, looting, and trafficking of our sacred items – all in violation of tribal and federal law. During the 2015 attempted sale of an Acoma Shield by the Eve Auction house in Paris, France, the Pueblo also identified a similar shield and other sensitive cultural items being sold here in the United States. The amount of resources and energy, the Pueblo of Acoma has expended in this matter is a reflection of the seriousness with which we treat the protection of items uniquely distinct to our culture. That is why when U.S. Attorney Anderson informed us that these items of cultural patrimony, including another Acoma Shield, were coming home -- our hearts were overjoyed," said Governor Riley.

The Pueblo worked tirelessly to have this investigative matter resolved amicably and to have the items repatriated and voluntarily returned to the Pueblo. Governor Riley added, "Many thanks go to the Department of Justice, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Justice Services and our own Pueblo leaders and tribal staff for working together to bring our sacred objects home. This is monumental in the national and international effort to return sacred objects back to their rightful homes. Acoma will continue to collaborate with our Federal partners to end the trafficking and illegal sales of protected tribal cultural items."

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