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Robert L. Bennett, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, today hailed the agreement to provide electric power for the Quinault Indian village of Queets, Wash., as "the final step in bringing the basic comforts of adequate homes to this community."

Bennett said the agreement is a "tribute to the ability of many different agencies representing several levels of government, and private enterprise to work out solutions to difficult problems." He noted that extremely complicated right-of-way problems and a multiplicity of jurisdictions created "many unusual problems that had to be solved before work could begin on the electric power transmission line."

The Bureau of Indian Affairs has built 20 new homes in Queets as part of a pilot project in total community redevelopment which includes new roads, water and sewer systems for the little fishing village on the Olympic Peninsula which until now has never had electric service.

The agreement, arrived at in consultation with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, calls for construction of a 15-mile underground power line to Queets. Participating in the agreement are the National Park Service, the State Highway Commission and the Grays Harbor Public Utilities District. The line should be finished by the end of the year, Bennett said.

"There has been wide comment on the fact that the homes the power arrived," Bennett said. "There was never any doubt responsible public officials that power would come to Queets. In the construction of the new homes we made provisions for heat, light and other available means until electricity could become available.

"We wired these homes for electricity since it is far more economical to wire a home during its construction than to go back later and install wiring. Many Indians took advantage of the opportunity to improve their homes beyond the basic house provided by the program by purchasing appliances and other improvements but the Bureau has not provided a single electrical appliance to any family in Queets."

The project is one of many "long overdue" housing programs in Indian communities, Bennett said. "There are housing programs of many types on many different Indian reservations," he said, "and where there is a good prospect that electricity will soon be available -- as in the case of Queets -- electric wiring is installed.

"I am confident that the public supports the many Federal, State and local programs designed to bridge the gap between the Indian standard of living and that of the rest of the Nation. The Queets program is just one small part of this effort, but it is an indication of the progress that can be achieved through cooperative enterprises.