Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Ben Reifel, a former South Dakota Congressman and an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, has accepted a "recess appointment" as Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

President Ford announced the appointment of Reifel December 7 following a recommendation by Secretary of the Interior Thomas S. Kleppe. Reifel succeeds Morris Thompson who left the post November 3 to return to Alaska as Vice President of the Alcan Pipeline Co.

Reifel will take the oath of office in a ceremony in Secretary Kleppe's office at 3:30 p.m. today.

Reifel, 70, worked 22 years with the Bureau of Indian Affairs before beginning five terms in Congress in 1960. He started with BIA as a Farm Agent on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. He later was Agency Superintendent at Pine Ridge and at the Fort Berthold Agency in North Dakota. He was, from 1955-60, Director of the Bureau's Aberdeen Area, which includes North and South Dakota and Nebraska.

A World War II Army veteran, Reifel is a graduate of South Dakota State College. He received a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Harvard in 1949. A John Hay Whitney Foundation Opportunity Fellowship enabled him to continue at Harvard for a Doctorate awarded in 1952. He has received honorary doctorates from both the South Dakota State University and the University of South Dakota.

Reifel served without compensation as an Assistant for Indian Affairs to the Director of the National Park Service from 1971 to 1974. He was Director of the American Indian National Bank when it was organized in 1973 and served as Chairman of the Board from March 1974 until he retired from that position in March, 1976.

He is president of Arrow, Inc., an Indian service organization, a member of the National Advisory Council of the Boy Scouts of America and on the Board of Trustees of the Freedom Foundation, Valley Forge, Pa. He is a member of the National Advisory Council for the Education of Disadvantaged Children and has been chairman of the National Capitol Planning Commission. He has been active on a number of other civic commissions and task forces.

Reifel was born on the Rosebud Reservation in 1906. His mother was a full-blood Indian and his father a German-American.