Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Forrest J. Gerard was ceremonially installed as the Department of the Interior's first Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs October 13.

Before an audience of Indian leaders, Congressional representatives and Interior Department officials, Interior Secretary Cecil D. Andrus formally administered the oath of office to Gerard.

Gerard was nominated by President Carter for the position on July 12. Confirmation hearings were held September 9 and 12 before the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs and the Senate voted to confirm his appointment on September 15. A private swearing-in on September 19 enabled Gerard to begin functioning as the Assistant Secretary.

At the Washington, D.C. ceremony, Andrus said that Gerard would have a new policy-making role at Interior. He pointed out that in the past Commissioners of Indian Affairs worked under an Assistant Secretary and did not have the influential position of the new Assistant Secretary. He said the elevation of the Indian Affairs post reflected the Administration's commitment to the Indian community.

Gerard said he considered the new status given to the Indian affairs post significant -- and not just a symbolic gesture or ego message. "The Indian community today is at a critical juncture of history. Decisions made in the next few years -- relating to Indian sovereignty, self-determination, and other major issues -- can set the course of Indian affairs for the next century. Consequently, I see my position as Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs as both a great opportunity and a very serious responsibility. I will do my best, working with the Indian leaders, to make this an area of progress and achievement for Indian people."

Gerard, a member of the Blackfeet Tribe, was staff assistant for the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs from 1971 through 1976. He was involved in the development of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, the Indian Financing Act, Menominee Restoration Act, Indian Health Care Improvement Act, and other major pieces of legislation.

A former official of the Indian Health Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Gerard received the 1976 Heller Award from the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) for outstanding service to Indian people and in 1966 he received the Indian achievement award presented by the Indian Council Fire.

A native of Browning, Montana, Gerard is a graduate of Montana State University and a World War II Air Force veteran.