Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
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Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus said today that he was very pleased with President Carter's nomination of Forrest J. Gerard to be the first Assistant Secretary of the interior for Indian Affairs.

Andrus said that the Indian community had expressed strong support for Gerard, a member of the Blackfeet Tribe. "Forrest Gerard has proven himself an intelligent advocate of Indian causes as well as a outstanding executive in his work with the Senate Interior Committee staff, Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service," Andrus said. "I am delighted that he will be the Department's first Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs."

As Staff Assistant for the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs from 1971 through 1976, Gerard was involved in the development of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, the Indian Financing Act, the Menominee Restoration Act, the Indian Health Care Improvement Act and the legislation establishing the American Indian Policy Review Commission.

Gerard was Legislative Liaison Officer for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1966-67 and Tribal Relations Officer for the Indian Health Service from 1957 to 1965. Since 1976 he has represented a number of Indian tribes through his firm, Forrest Gerard & Associates.

Andrus said that the nomination culminated a selection process begun in February when he wrote tribal leaders to ask them to recommend persons "to head this Nation's highest post relating to Indian affairs."

The Secretary asked the Indian leaders to give reasons for their choices- keeping in mind that the person selected would have to be both the administrator of a large, complex organization and the strong voice in Washington of the Indian community.

Under Secretary James Joseph, who coordinated the selection process said that from about 40 different persons recommended, Andrus selected a small number with the greatest support combined with the best qualifications for special interviews. After further consultation with Indian leaders, the Secretary submitted his recommendation to the White House.

Gerard, a native of Browning, Montana, opened his own consulting office after leaving the Senate Subcommittee Staff in December 1976.

A graduate of Montana State University and a World War II Air Force veteran, Gerald worked for the Montana State Department of Public Instruction, the Montana Tuberculosis Association and the, Wyoming Tuberculosis and Health Association before coming to Washington in 1957 as Tribal Relations Officer for the Indian Health Service, HEW.

In 1965 Gerard was awarded a one-year Fellowship in Congressional Operations, sponsored jointly by the U.S. Civil Service Commission and the American Political Science Association. In 1966 he was named Legislative Officer for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Gerard, 52, received the annual Heller Award this year from the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) for outstanding service to Indian people nationwide.

He also received in 1966 the Indian Achievement award presented by the Indian Council Fire, and the Superior Service Award of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Selections from a comprehensive paper on Indian affairs written in 1976 by Gerard have appeared recently in some Indian publications. The paper was entitled “Congressional Responsibility for American Indian Policy--History, is Current and Future Goals."

Gerard and his wife and five children reside in Bowie, Maryland.