Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus told Bureau of Indian Affairs employees March 31 that he has taken no position - pro or con - on the American Indian Policy Review Commission recommendation to remove Indian affairs from the Department of the Interior in favor of a separate, independent agency.

Andrus, at a meeting with the BIA employees in Washington, D.C., said that his initiation of a process to affect the appointment of an Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs should not be interpreted as a prejudgement of the separate agency recommendation. He said that he was moving to recommend someone for the Indian Affairs job because it appeared that it would be some time yet before any decision would be made on the AIPRC recommendation.

Under Secretary James Joseph, who was sworn into office March 23 and who has been playing a lead role in Indian affairs in the Department, reported that 75 tribes responded to the Secretary's request for nominees for the Assistant Secretary post. He said that 37 persons were nominated, a profile of qualifications prepared for each of them and a smaller number selected for further consideration. He said that there would be further consultation with Indian organizations, interviews with final candidates and then a recommendation made to the President.

Joseph said that it would probably be a few weeks before a recommendation would be made to the White House and require some time after that to have an appointment made and confirmed.

In a question period, Andrus was asked if he had reason to think that Indian tribes supported the AIPRC recommendation to establish an independent agency for Indian affairs. Andrus replied that some tribal chairmen had expressed their support for the move, but he did not know if this was a majority opinion.