Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus announced today that he has asked Indian tribal leaders to recommend nominees "to head this nation's highest post relating to Indian affairs." He said this position had formerly been that of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, but would be according to Departmental plans, raised to the rank of Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs.

Andrus, in a letter dated February 17 to the tribal officials, cited President Carter's promise to consult with tribal leaders on issues of concern to Indian people. He asked them to submit recommendations by March 11.

The Secretary asked that the recommendations be made "following a discussion by your governing body, and in the form of a resolution. However, if the time frame I have set for this is too short for the governing body to meet, I would appreciate your personal views."

The tribal leaders were asked to give reasons for their choices, keeping in mind the need for the person selected to be both an advocate of Indian causes and the administrator of a large, complex organization.

From the recommendations, Andrus said he would select the persons with the strongest support combined with the best qualifications to be interviewed "for the purpose of assessing their abilities, commitment and compatibility with the goals of this administration." After further consultation with Indian leaders, Andrus said he would then make his recommendation to the president.

Concluding his letter, Andrus wrote: "As Secretary, I recognize and hold sacred the special trust placed upon me in respect to Indian tribes and their resources. I pledge to you my intention to make Indian affairs a major priority of this Department.