Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: February 8, 1974
Print PDF

Commissioner of Indian Affairs Morris Thompson on February 8, 1974 issued the following statement in connection with Feb, 7's tribal election at the Oglala Sioux Reservation, Pine Ridge, South Dakota:

Following yesterday's election in which the uncertified results indicate that Richard Wilson won by a plurality of about 200 votes over Russell Means, a number of allegations of "massive election fraud" have been made, and the Department of the Interior has been asked by Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee to send a large investigation team to the reservation.

Based on our present information, there does not appear to be sufficient evidence of voting fraud or irregularities to warrant Federal intervention at this time. The Federal Government intends, however, closely to monitor developments in this situation and if any such evidence is developed giving validity to these charges, we will see that a complete and proper investigation is made.

This election was exclusively a tribal election, supervised by a tribal election board. It was the function of this board, under the tribal ordinance, to conduct the election and certify its results. The tribal ordinance also provides for the filing of complaints concerning election irregularities and fraud with this board. The board is empowered to rule on those pro tests and, if warranted, recommend the calling of a new election. In addition, each candidate had a poll watcher at each of the 22 voting precincts.

Prior to the election the Bureau of Indian Affairs was requested to provide for observers at the polls. The Community Relations Service of the Justice Department sent two of its officials to Pine Ridge with the knowledge of the Department of the Interior to look into the arrangements for the election. During the election, two lawyers from the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department were at Pine Ridge to receive any complaints of election irregularities, and their presence was known to both candidates and their supporters.