Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Ada Deer today expressed strong concern over recent recommendations by Congressional Budget Committees to reduce the 1997 President's Budget for American Indian tribes and the Bureau of Indian Affairs with cuts from $100 million to $250 million.

The recommendations came as part of the FY 1997 balanced budget resolution. Each year the House and Senate Budget Committees develop the budget resolution, which is the overall guide on the next year's federal spending limit. The budget resolution does not require the President's signature, but once adopted by Congress the appropriations committees cannot exceed the spending limits.

If the final decisions of Congress are in alignment with the Budget Committees. Indian tribes will suffer yet another major setback," Deer said. "Tribes need increased funds-that is to say a restoration of funds cut in the 1996 budget-to accommodate such essential needs as the 4,000 Indian children being added to BIA schools rolls between 1995 and 1997. Another alarming budget

The Budget Committees' recommendations for the BIA are suggestions as to how to meet the overall funding levels. Last year, the funding levels in the budget resolutions resulted in deep cuts and elimination of PIOIQW government-wide, including a reduction in the 1996 BIA budget of $130 million, or eight percent below 1995.

Recommendations from both Budget Committees would put the BIA 1997 budget below the 1995 level. The House Committee recommendations are particularly severe, reducing BIA programs by $185 million below FY 1995. If Indian Country suffers further reductions in the upcoming fiscal year, unemployment on the reservations will increase, BIA schools will lose accreditation, the economic investments in natural resources will not be realized, and tribal governments will not achieve the level of self-governance envisioned by the Indian Self-Determination legislation.

The House Budget Committee plans to achieve savings of $324 million over the next six yean by creating a new American Indian block grant program. Deer observes that savings would have to be extracted directly from tribal programs because the BIA's administrative costs are very low and amount to less than 10 percent of the operating budget.

The 1997 President's Budget provides $205 million over 1996 appropriated funds in order to restore funding to BIA programs. The budget stresses the resources Tribes need to provide basic reservation programs and to develop strong and stable governments; ensure accreditation of BIA schools; address critical reservation infrastructure needs; and meet the Secretary of the Interior's American Indian trust responsibilities. Of particular importance is the restoration of funds lost in the 1996 budget for Tribal Priority Allocations (TPA). FY 1997 provides an increase of $68 million, or nine percent over the comparable 1995 TPA level, and is vital for such ongoing tribal programs as law enforcement, road maintenance, scholarships, and housing repair. "'This budget reflects President Clinton's ongoing commitment to Indian people," said Deer, "and demonstrates a realistic assessment of the needs of Indian tribes."

In 1997, nine of every 10 dollars appropriated to the BIA's operations account will be provided to education and other on-the-ground programs at the reservation level. " I want to emphasize that nine out of every 10 dollars goes to tribes," Deer said.

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