Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Restoration of federal funds needed for Tribal Priority Allocations (TPA) that provide basic reservation programs and develop strong and stable tribal governments is a key component of the Fiscal Year 1997 Bureau of Indian Affairs $1. 78-billion budget request.

"As we approach the 21st Century, it is critical that the more than 550 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes receive the basic support needed to end the cycles of poverty and poor health that afflict so many tribal members," says Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Ada E. Deer. "Restoring these essential Tribal priority funds is key to honoring the federal trust responsibility to Tribes and fulfilling the government-to-government relationship with Tribes."

Tribes depend on the TPA budget for such basic necessities as law enforcement, child welfare, scholarships, natural resources management, and other programs designed to improve the quality of life and economic development potential on their reservations. Tribes can prioritize the funding for programs according to their own tribal circumstances and needs.

The BIA 1997 budget request reflects an overall $211-million increase above the 1996 Conference level including $158 million for TPA restoration. Besides strengthening tribal programs, the restored funds overall will ensure the accreditation of BIA schools, address critical infrastructure needs, and meet the Secretary of the Interior's trust responsibilities.

The BIA school operations budget of $452 million is devoted to Indian education programs that serve more than 51,000 elementary and secondary students in 23 states. A $43.5-million increase over the 1996 education budget is requested so that schools can meet state and regional accreditation standards and accommodate a projected 3.5-percent increase in student enrollment. More than one-third of the requested $122-million BIA construction budget is for education construction.

New school construction is funded at $18 million in order to build the $14-million Many Farms High School in Arizona and to complete $4 million in construction remaining at the Chief Leschi school complex in Washington State. The budget also includes $23 million to correct health and safety deficiencies at BIA educational facilities.

Combined funding for BIA Central and Area Office activities and related support services is set at $144.5 million, which is $27.5 million less than two years ago. BIA streamlining and downsizing is reflected in the fact that 90 percent of the Bureau's operations account is devoted to education, social services, and other programs at the reservation level. Contrary to occasional reports, this means that 90 cents of every BIA operations dollar is delivered directly to the reservation.