Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Ada E. Deer, Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs, today expressed her gratitude to Vice President Al Gore for directly intervening on behalf of Americans Indians in last week's intense negotiations over the Department of the Interior's (DOI) continued funding resolution.

"Vice President Gore once again demonstrated his strong leadership and concern over the devastating effect massive budget cuts would have on American Indian programs," said Ms. Deer. "His efforts will have a decisive and immediate positive impact on the Indian Community," she says.

The debate between President Clinton and Congressional Republicans over the federal government's fiscal year 1996 budget resulted in his veto of an Interior Appropriations bill he considered mean-spirited and unacceptable in cuts to Indian and environmental programs. In retaliation, many Bureaus were targeted by Congress to receive drastically reduced funding in the continuing resolution. However, Vice President Gore championed the cause of Indian tribal governments in tough last-minute negotiations with the Congress. As a result, funding for Indian tribal governments will be provided at the agreed upon 1996 Conference level as opposed to announced cuts between 25 and 36 percent, as the Senate had supported.

Federal government funding for Indian tribal governments is critical because, unlike city, county, or state governments that typically have a non-federal tax base as a primary source of revenue, Indian tribes often rely on federal funds for service delivery.

Without this direct intervention, many Indian tribal governments face severe reductions in their ability to provide for tribal members, particularly the elderly and children who depend on these services.

Ms. Deer cautioned that tribes should not be too optimistic. "We're not out of the woods yet," she said. "This funding runs out on March 15th. The Senate is still threatening cuts of 25% or more in the future."