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Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan said today the confirmation of Carl J. Kunasek of Arizona as Commissioner of the Office of Navajo &Hopi Relocation signals the beginning of the final phase in settling the century-old land dispute between the two Indian tribes. President Bush nominated Kunasek and the U.S. Senate confirmed the appointment on May 22, 1990, after a hearing before the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs.

"Carl Kunasek has pledged to complete the congressionally-mandated relocation program in a fair, equitable and compassionate manner," Lujan noted. "His impressive record as a leader in the Arizona Legislature and his work in the private sector indicate that he is well-qualified for this demanding assignment. He will have the strong support of my office and the entire Interior Department." Kunasek becomes the first full-time commissioner of the relocation program, replacing a three-member, part-time commission established under a 1974 law.

Kunasek, 58, served 16 years in the Arizona Legislature, and was President of the State Senate in his final term. He owned and operated a pharmacy in Mesa, Arizona, from 1961 to 1984, and worked in the real estate business the past two years. After graduating from the Creighton University College of Pharmacy in 1955, Kunasek served three years as a Medical Service Corp Officer at Stead Air Force Base, Reno, Nevada. Kunasek returned to his native Omaha Nebraska, in 1958 to work as a pharmacist for several years before moving to Arizona. Kunasek and his wife, Kathryn Frances, have three grown children.

In a 1988 law, the Congress eliminated the three-member relocation commission and established a new Office of Navajo &Hopi Relocation under the Secretary of the Interior. The commissioner is appointed for a 5-year term. Previously, the commission has been semi-autonomous, operating with administrative support from Interior. The law revamping the relocation commission also mandates an updated report on the status of the program and the development of a new plan for completing the relocation. The relocation program was initiated by Congress after courts settled boundary disputes dating back to 1885.

-- The Tribes have the option to market about 130,000 acre-feet annually of storage space in Palisades and American Fall Reservoirs, providing income for the Tribes and allowing water for fishery purposes;

-- Federal funding of $7 million would be provided over 20 years to encourage the Tribes to develop a water code and modernize their water management system;

-- Mechanisms are provided to resolve conflicts between Indian and non-Indian water users, including an Inter-Governmental Board, provision for non-Indian purchase of tribal water during times of shortages, and allowance for non-Indians to contract for 99,480 acre-feet annually of storage space in Bureau of Reclamation projects without assuming construction costs of those projects.

The Fort Hall Reservation, more than 540,000 acres in southeastern Idaho, was created by Presidential Order in 1867. A negotiating team, representing the Federal Government, worked with the Tribes, the

State, and local non-Indian water users to resolve longstanding disputes over the water rights. Negotiating teams including representatives from the Department of the Interior, Justice Department and Office of Management and Budget are involved in efforts to settle various other Indian water claims cases throughout the Nation.
