Media Contact: Office of the Secretary
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I have called this news conference today to announce a series of actions relating to Indian water rights, contracts, roads, self-government, and legislative programs.

My purpose in taking these initiatives towards Indian self-government is setting a course for the Bureau of Indian Affairs designed to protect Indian Resources and effectively with the roads of Indian dissatisfaction poverty unemployment and inadequate educational background in my opinion to advance the cause of the Indian people of this nation.

First, water rights.

Most reservations are in the arid West and depend for a development upon adequate water supplies. In the past, Indian rights have not been protected. I intend to change that I intend to do my best to see that Indians get their fair share of water.

To insure effective advocacy of Indian water rights, I am establishing an Indian water rights office. It will serve as an interim body until enactment of legislation proposed by the president which calls for creation of an Indian Trust Counsel Authority.

This office will include members of the solicitor's office, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Geological Survey. It will be the focal point for seeing that appropriate action is taken to protect Indian water rights including timely preparation of suits for submission to the justice department for filing in the courts.

This office will report to the commissioner of Indian Affairs, and he will report directly to me on water rights matters. In this way we can ensure that proper emphasis and priority continues to be given to this activity. I am also inviting the national tribal chairmen's Association to appoint an Advisory Board to work with the Indian water rights office.

After further consultation with Indian leadership reveal announce the director, deputy director and other appointees supplementing their work will be correspondingly constituted.

Two million dollars will be funded for the first years of operation of the Indian water rights office and its field team program.

I have recommended to the justice department that it file suit to protect underground water rights of the Lummi Indian Washington State Department is also intervening in the Escondido case now before the federal power commission and in a state of Idaho proceeding (Duck Valley) Moreover, the department also intends to intervene in another Federal power commission matter involving the Chippewa Dam.

Next, Contracting and Self- Government Programs.

The expressed desire of many Indian tribes and groups is to contract with the BIA so that they may

provide services hitherto performed by the BIA. In addition to the 724 contractors with Indians that have been renewed since May 1st, 1971, I have approved 93 new contract with the total value of $2,435,000.

These numbers show that contacting has by no means come to your halt despite allegations from a few quarters that this is the case. Nevertheless there's much more to be done in this direction.

I feel confident that the House and Senate interior committees will soon provide us an opportunity to appear before them in support of the president's proposed new legislation providing for broader Contracting Authority.

In the meantime we will continue to work out self-governing agreement under the authority of the Snyder act the Johnson O'Malley Act and the Buy Indian Act to the greatest extent possible within budgetary restraint we will continue to issue contracts for the procurement of goods and services from Indians and Indian groups.

Moreover, we are establishing a full-time training program to train BIA employees and Prospective contractors in procedures and methods relating to the Contracting process, to insure that effective Arrangements will result. We will also work with Indian organizations, tribal or otherwise to help them equip themselves to qualify for contract. Existing training projects now handled under the office of Economic Opportunity will be expanded. Tribal and government Management training contacts will be set up in cooperation with the Department of Labor.

Next, Roads for Indian Reservations.

A modern network of Roads is the prime physical system upon which social and economic development depend. Indian Reservation communities live in the 1930s with respect to the adequacy of their surface Transportation roadways. This is an obstruction to Health Services, today schooling, to Industry, tourism, to housing and sanitation.

Until 1935, no roads were constructed on federally related Indian reservations. Since that time, the pace of construction has fallen far short of being commensurate with highway and road building in the US as a whole. The Indian areas are doomed to continuing in isolation and poverty until modern roads are built. The BIA has developed a comprehensive construction plan under the direction of Alexander McNabb. I'm working in the Office of Management and budget and the Department of Transportation to seek funding that will open up in Indian communities through modern roads systems.

Now, a few comments on legislation.

I am releasing the text of a letter of September 20th 1971 from assistant Secretary Loesch to senate interior committee chairman Henry Jackson clarifying the Department's position on the importance of items in the president's Indian legislation program. Certainly the creation of an Indian first Counsel Authority is of prime importance to implement the president's program for Indians.

I will be the leadoff witness for the Indian First Counsel and other presidential legislative proposals as soon as the Senate intelligence committee confirms its schedule of hearings on these bills.

I am delighted to see the House and Senate interior Committee Action on the Alaska Native Claims bill, a matter so important to Indians the bills reported out already close to the version proposed by the

president. What this shows is that there is a consensus among executive and the lawmakers of both parties reflecting fairness and equity in matters affecting this nation's first Americans. I am sure the other Indian measures proposed by the president will receive equally favorable treatment in Congress.

Now to other actions I am taking.

On the recommendation of the board of directors of the national Tribal Chairman's Association I am creating Advisory Board to assure better Communications among the Bureau of Indian Affairs secretary's office in the national Indian Community. as the NTCA board suggested the group will be comprised of 15 members including representatives from the National Congress of American Indians the national tree tribal chairmen's Association and other Indian groups from reservation and otherwise.

I am instructing assistant secretary Loesch and Commissioner Bruce to have a special briefing prepared on the fiscal year 1973 budget of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This briefing will be presented for information and advice to officers of the national tribal chairmen's Association and of the National Congress of American Indians prior to the secretary's final approval there off.

I feel that these measures will help move the BIA efficiency and successfully on its course of implementing President Nixon's program which he outlined in his July 1970 message to Congress.

But I do not suggest that these steps are the only ones necessary. As further need to become apparent or additional actions are needed we are committed to respond constructively to them.