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A score of Indian leaders, representing the national Indian community, met in Albuquerque May 3-4 with Interior Assistant Secretary Forrest Gerard and staff to be briefed about Gerard's management improvement program for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The Indian participants, invited through the National Tribal Chairmen's Association (NTCA) and the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) were told about the plans --and accomplishments to date --to decentralize Bureau management authority, install a new, expanded computer system for both program and fiscal operations, establish an administrative services center and a training and technical assistance center, and clarify the roles of the Bureau's central and area offices.

Gerard has spoken frequently to Indian groups about his plans to make more-than-cosmetic changes in the BIA management system. The session in Albuquerque was the first opportunity for a nuts-and-bolts review on all the projects involved.

Discussion covered the operations and cost of the new computer system and how services would be paid for; Gerard's interest in a continued Indian consultation process; whether the studies will lead to real decentralization, particularly at Area level; how the Bureau might respond to tribes needing management assistance now in operating contracts under P.L. 93-638; and how this study/plan is leading to short-term results, as well as setting the stage for longer term benefits.

Participants received summary information in a 30-page handout which included reports on information systems, a system for improved tracking of budget execution, administrative services reform, the central office review, the technical assistance and training project, and the Area Office reviews.

Gerard described the Bureau's present computer system as "ready for the Smithsonian." He said that the cost of replacing it and putting in the right kind of system will be "exceedingly high," hence he stressed the need for prudent acquisition and effective and efficient operations. He noted that Congress was providing some direct funding for the needed changes.