Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Robert L. Bennett, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, announced today that he has asked for tribal ratification of a proposal to establish an "American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame," on the campus of Haskell Institute, Lawrence, Kans.

"The Hall of Fame," Bennett said, "will not only memorialize the achievements of great Indian athletes but will be a source of inspiration for young Indians seeking to develop rewarding and productive lives in modern America."

A copy of the proposed constitution of the new organization and a list of a 13-member board of trustees has been sent to heads of tribal organizations throughout the Nation, Bennett said.

"We hope to secure ratification of this proposal and be ready to formally organize and select the initial inductees to the Hall of Fame in the fall," Bennett said. "Indians in many areas have already enthusiastically endorsed the Hall of Fame idea," Bennett said, "and I am confident it will receive the wholehearted endorsement of most American Indian and Alaska Native peoples."

Bennett noted that while the Bureau of Indian Affairs served as coordinator the plans to create the Hall of Fame, the organization will not be an official federal activity. "This will be an Indian organization operated by Indians for the benefit of Indians and all America," he said.

Miss Grace Thorpe, daughter of All-America football star Jim Thorpe, was among those Bennett appointed to the special committee which drew up the Hall of Fame constitution and selected its first board of trustees. Other members of the committee were: Tom Wilson, Office of Public Information, BIA, Chairman; Mitchell Bush, president, American Indian Society, Washington, D.C., executive secretary, George p. LaVatta, retired BIA employee, Portland, Ore., member; John O. Crow, associate director of the Bureau of Land Management, member; and Gus Welch, former Carlisle athlete, now of Bedford, Va., honorary chairman.

The members of the first board of trustees are: Harold Schunk, Yankton Sioux, Aberdeen Area; Clarence Tallbull, Cheyenne Arapaho, Anadarko Area; Clarence Acoya, Laguna Pueblo, Albuquerque Area; Walter McDonald, Flathead, Billings Area; Dr. Walter Soboleff, Tlingit, Juneau Area; Roger Jourdain, Red Lake Chippewa, Minneapolis Area; Overton James, Chickasaw, Muskogee Area; Joe Watson, Navajo, Navajo Area; Albert Hawley, Fort Belknap, Phoenix Area; George LaVatta, Shoshone-Bannock, Portland Area; Elijah Smith, Oneida, Sacramento Area; Louis R. Bruce, Jr., Mohawk-Sioux, Northeastern U.S. and Frell Owle, Eastern Cherokee, Southeastern U.S.

The constitution provides that after their initial terms expire board members will be elected by the Indian or Alaska Native peoples in the area they represent.