Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Proposed new regulations for HEW's programs of assistance for college students have been described as a "major breakthrough in Indian education" by Commissioner of Indian Affairs Morris Thompson.

In a letter to HEW Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger, Thompson expressed his "strong support" for the new rules published in the Federal Register in March. They set forth provisions for coordinating the HEW programs with BIA's higher education assistance program.

Thompson noted that because of "confusion and inconsistency in college and university financial aid offices.... Indian students were denied the full benefits of HEW assistance." He pointed out that while BIA funds were meant to be supplemental to other resources available, they were often used as the primary or sole source of assistance for Indian students. He said the proposed rules "clarify this situation."

The proposed rules set forth specific instructions that HEW assistance programs are to be made available to Indian students without consideration of possible BIA assistance. BIA funds can then be used to meet any still unmet need and, if sufficient, to reduce the need for student loans and work-study programs.

Thompson summarized the effect of this supplemental-only use of BIA funds. "Very simply, the implementation of these new rules will mean that more Indian people will be able to receive college educations and, consequently, be better prepared to contribute to the development of the Indian community."