Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Assistant Secretary Forrest J. Gerard announced today actions in the ongoing effort to organize and improve the management systems and structure of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus and Under Secretary James Joseph announced September 21, 1978, that they had reviewed and approved the general principles of a reorganization plan for the administration of Indian Affairs. Although the reorganization plan has not been given final approval by Andrus and Joseph pending analysis by them of all details of the plant they have given authorization.to begin implementation of some features of the reorganization.

The first steps of the pIan includes a vigorous search for a BIA Commissioner, appointment of an interim agency head, immediate assignment of a Gerard deputy to direct and concentrate full effort on the BIA Management Improvement Project, and establishment of two planning and evaluation offices at the Assistant Secretary level.

The actions "maintain the integrity of the recommendations of the Secretary's Task Force on BIA Reorganization, while reflecting the analyses and comments of tribal leaders and employee-review teams," stated Gerard. One Task Force recommendation called for an Indian Affairs structure of an Assistant Secretary, three deputies, and an agency head.

"Our plan," Gerard explained, "follows a less cumbersome and more conventional structure: an Assistant Secretary, with one deputy at the Departmental level, and a Commissioner, with one deputy at the Bureau level. This structure permits the Assistant Secretary to give greater attention to the responsibilities as principal policy advisor to the Secretary on Indian matters affecting the Administration, while the Commissioner will provide needed leadership and direction for the Bureau on a daily basis."

The Assistant Secretary said that his office "will oversee the selection process and tribal consultation which will lead to the nomination and confirmation of the Commissioner. It is essential that the person be in place early in 1979." As an interim measure, Gerard announced the temporary appointment of Martin E. Seneca, Jr., as Acting Deputy Commissioner and LaFollette Butler as Acting Assistant to the Deputy Commissioner. They will serve as functional and operational heads of the Bureau until the selection and confirmation of the BIA Commissioner. Seneca, a Seneca Indian, is Director of the Office of Trust Responsibilities, and Butler, a Cherokee, is Special Assistant to the Phoenix Area Director.

In this phase of the action plan, the Assistant Secretary:

- Assigned Deputy Assistant Secretary George V. Goodwin to head the Management Improvement Project, directing at the Departmental level the implementation of the overall effort to organize the BIA management systems. "This assignment of my top administrative staff to devote full attention to this vital Project demonstrates the seriousness with which the Secretary, Under Secretary and I approach our responsibility to meet the critical needs in Indian country through an efficient, effective and organized trust services agency." Gerard said.

- Assigned Deputy Assistant Secretary Rick C. Lavis to serve in a generalized capacity at the Departmental level, with functional duties broadened beyond his present designation as deputy for program operations. --Announced that: two new offices will be established in the Office of the Assistant Secretary to provide a stronger planning and evaluation function at that level.
- Announced the continuation of the BIA Area Offices as intermediate levels of authority, with future changes in the role of the 12 offices to be determined by future action plans and office-by-office reviews.
- Announced a review of administrative procedures to determine which authorities are to be delegated to the lowest operating level of the BIA and whether economies can be achieved by eliminating overlapping functions

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