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**For Immediate Release:** September 21, 1978
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·Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus and Under Secretary James Joseph reported today that they have reviewed and approved the general principles of a reorganization plan for the administration of Indian affairs.

Andrus and Joseph said that implementation of most major features of the plan, developed by Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Forrest Gerard, and would begin promptly after analysis of the plan's details.

Gerard's recommendations, which he announced today at the National Congress of American Indians annual convention in Rapid City, South Dakota, include:

--The appointment of a Commissioner of Indian Affairs to direct the day-today activities of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

--An emphasis on policy, planning and evaluation at the Assistant Secretary level.

--Continuation of the BIA's area offices as intermediate levels of authority, with any future changes in the role of these offices to be determined through studies to be made in each of the areas.

Gerard, in submitting his recommendations to the Secretariat, said: "Improvements in management systems are of greater importance than shifting boxes on an organization chart...I intend to institute changes which will be fundamental, extensive and enduring."

Gerard's recommendations embodied the basic concepts of recommendations submitted to him by a reorganization task force appointed last December. The recommendations of this group were published April 17 in the Federal Register for review and comment by the Indian community.

The task force had recommended that the top leadership for Indian affairs consist of the Assistant Secretary and three deputies. Gerard's proposal is that the Assistant Secretary with one deputy function at the departmental level and the Commissioner and a deputy operate at the bureau level.

Gerard said that this arrangement would permit the Assistant Secretary to give undivided attention to his "responsibilities as principal advisor and policy maker for the Secretary on matters of Indian affairs affecting the whole Department and the Administration, " while the Commissioner provides needed leadership and direction for the Bureau.

The new organization structure calls for a strong planning and evaluation function within the Office of the Assistant Secretary. Two staff offices are proposed.

One would be concerned with oversight of administrative functions, reviewing the allocation, use and control of resources. Functions would include fiscal audits, personnel and procurement reviews and ADP policy planning.

The other staff office reporting to the Assistant Secretary would be responsible for policy, planning and evaluation. Functions would include policy formulation and analysis, management and program audits and systems and action plan development.

The reorganization plan calls for a review of each area office to determine the future role each should have. Gerard said he did not think the area offices need to be mirror images of the central office nor identical to each other. He said these offices might reflect the diversity among tribes with structures designed to meet tribal problems.

Eliminating the area offices, a recommendation of the American Indian Policy Review Commission, would have resulted in a minimum of 82 agency superintendents reporting directly to Washington. Gerard described this as an "unworkable" span of control for the Commissioner.

Gerard stressed that "a fundamental prerequisite to implementing the reorganization of the Bureau of Indian Affairs is the involvement of Indian tribes and Alaska Native groups. These will be consulted on actions that affect service delivery to their people throughout this effort. "