Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Ayres 202-343-7445
For Immediate Release: December 7, 1973
Print PDF

Commissioner of Indian Affairs Morris Thompson pointed yesterday to this Administration's "solid record of achievement" in achieving restorations of land to Indian tribes in an address to the National Tribal Chairmen's Association in Phoenix, Ariz., December 6.

The National Tribal Chairmen's Association, which includes the heads of each American Indian tribe recognized by the United States government and entitled to services of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, is holding its annual meeting in Phoenix December 5 - 8.

''Native Americans have received increasingly large restorations of land," he said, He cited return of 48,000 acres of land to the Taos Pueblo in New Mexico, 21,000 acres of land including part of Mount Adams to the Yakima Tribe in the State of Washington, and 40,000,000 acres of land that will go to Alaska Natives in the State of Alaska under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

"Still pending in the Congress, in varying stages of progress but not yet enacted into law are seven pieces of Indian legislation," he continued. "One of my jobs will be to push hard for the passage of these bills. If they were all passed next week, we would be further ahead in self-determination than we have been in 150 years.

"As a matter of fact, we propose to enlist the help of Congressional leaders in getting this legislation through the mill -- as a Bicentennial present to our Nation's first Americans," he told the leaders of the American Indian tribes of this country.

He told the group that assembled to hear his talk: "In a nutshell, here is the Federal Government's policy today: it offers self-determination and self-government to Indian people as rapidly as Indians want it and can assume responsibility for it. In other words, tribes have the option of assuming control of their own Federal programs whenever they wish to do so. Furthermore, they will not be cut off from Federal support; they need only demonstrate strong and responsible tribal government and the ability to handle programs on their own."