Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Morris Thompson, 34, Athabascan Indian and native of the State of Alaska, was sworn in yesterday as Commissioner of Indian Affairs by Secretary of the Interior Rogers C.B. Morton to become the 41st and youngest Commissioner of the 141-year-old B1U'eau of Indian Affairs

"Of all the people I have talked with about the complexity and challenge and role that we have in the Department of the Interior regarding American Indians, Morris Thompson has had the most universal grasp," said Secretary Morton as he introduced the new Commissioner of Indian Affairs to a Department of the Interior auditorium filled with Bureau of Indian Affairs employees, the Alaska and other Congressional delegates, friends of the new Commissioner from Alaska and elsewhere and officials of the Department of the Interior.

He also pointed to Thompson's record in administering the complex facets of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which will put one-twelfth of the State of Alaska in the hands of Alaska Natives beginning early in 1974.

After taking the oath of office, Thompson said "I accept this responsibility only because of the faith and confidence I have in this Administration, this Congress, and the many dedicated employees of the Bureau and most of all my faith and confidence in the Indian people of America."

He continued: "We have" just endured some the stormiest months ever in Indian Affairs. One positive result of this, however, is that this country now has a new awareness of Indian needs. With the positive actions being taken by this Administration and this Congress, and the emergence of strong Indian leadership both at the local and national levels, the climate is right for truly meaningful progress."

Thompson paid particular respects to Marvin L. Franklin, Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior whom Morton pointed out had taken the administrative control in the absence of a Commissioner of Indian Affairs. "Mr. Franklin agreed to accept this post and the reins of the Bureau at probably the most difficult period in Indian affairs history. During this time, he had the ability to see through the many distractions and helped the Bureau re-focus its attention on its primary mission --meeting its trust responsibilities and providing services to Indians."

Secretary of the Interior Rogers C.B. Morton earlier paid tribute to tribal leaders for their contribution to solutions for Indian problems.

Thompson was born in Tanana, Alaska, September 11, 1939. On March 1, 1971, he was named by then Commissioner of Indian Affairs Louis R. Bruce as the Alaska Area Director of the Bureau. Thompson was the first Alaska Native to be Alaska Area Director and was the youngest man ever to be named to a BIA Area Director post.

Prior to his Alaska assignment, Thompson had served in the Department of the Interior as a special assistant for Indian Affairs to former Secretary Walter J. Hickel.

Thompson is married to the former Thelma Mayo, Fort Yukon, Alaska, three children.