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Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton today called President Nixon's nomination today, of Morris Thompson! 34, of Juneau, Alaska, to be Commissioner of Indian Affairs "a key step in assuring constructive progress in helping our Indian citizens move forward."

"Morris Thompson, an Indian himself, will bring to the Bureau of Indian Affairs the professional qualifications and leadership which are needed to meet the urgent challenges facing the Indian people today," Secretary Morton said.

"We have begun to move and move in a very orderly way to upgrade our delivery system and our service to the Indians and I think the time has been well-spent in our search for exactly the right man for this job," Morton added.

Thompson is an Athabascan Indian, 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. He will also be the youngest man to serve as Commissioner.

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

Thompson attended the University of Alaska, majoring in civil engineering with a minor in political science. He was graduated from the RCA Institute of Technology in Los Angeles in 1965 and from 1965 to 1967 he worked as a technician at the RCA satellite tracking facility at Gilmore Creek near Fairbanks, Alaska. While employed there he served as chairman of the board of the Fairbanks Native Association. In 1967 and 1968 he served as deputy director for rural development for the State of Alaska and in 1968 and 1969 he was executive secretary of the NORTH Commission which advised the Governor of Alaska on matters relating to the development of the Arctic regions in northern Alaska. Thompson is married and has three children.

Thompson succeeds Louis R. Bruce, whose resignation as Commissioner was announced December 8, 1972, and became effective January 20, 1973. On February 7, 1973, Secretary Morton announced the appointment of Marvin L. Franklin to the new position of Assistant to the Secretary for Indian Affairs. Since his appointment, Franklin, who reports directly to the Secretary, has been responsible for Department programs concerning Indian and Alaska Native people.