Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Kevin K. Washburn, speaking on behalf of the entire Department of the Interior, today issued the following statement on the passing of Forrest J. Gerard, a member of the Blackfeet Tribe in Montana and the first Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs who served from Oct. 13, 1977 to Jan. 19, 1980:

"Forrest Gerard will loom large in the history books as a key figure in American Indian policy. As a congressional staffer, he helped advance the interests of both the United States and Indian country by shepherding through Congress the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975, which formally marked the end of the Termination Era and the beginning of an important new chapter in federal-tribal relations.

"President Jimmy Carter selected Mr. Gerard to serve as the very first Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of the Interior. In this selection, President Carter elevated the importance of Indian affairs and Mr. Gerard used the newly established office to implement successfully the important new policies that he had helped enact in Congress.

"Tribal self-determination policies have transformed Indian country, making tribal governments stronger and improving services to Indian people. The United States and Indian country are better today because of Mr. Gerard's contributions.

"On a personal note, I will always value the advice Mr. Gerard offered as I began my own service as Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Gerard family and the Blackfeet Tribe community. He will be greatly missed."