Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Kevin Gover today announced that $16.5 million will be distributed this month to 310 small and needy American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes to provide adequate funding for tribal governments and operations. Small and needy tribes are those that have less than $160,000 in annual funding and have 1,500 or fewer members enrolled. Tribes in Alaska must have less than $200,000 in annual funding to qualify.

"These funds will provide some of the neediest tribes with a critical economic boost to strengthen their governments and operations," Gover said. "These funds are by no means a cure-all, but will help small and needy tribes to create and maintain a basic government structure. We thank Congress for approving this important step to further Indian self determination and the government-to-government relationship." The distribution of the $16.5 million to the tribes' tribal priority allocations will ensure that all tribes receive at least $160,000 annually, which has been determined to be the minimum amount needed to fund a tribal government in the lower 48 states. The minimum amount in Alaska is $200,000.

This minimum funding initiative will be felt most strongly in Alaska, which has 209 small and needy tribes. Seventy-six small and needy tribes in California will receive the additional funds. Small and needy tribes in New York, Michigan, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Nevada, and Utah also will share in the distribution.

The Joint Tribal/Bureau of Indian Affairs/Department of the Interior Task Force on BIA Reorganization initiated the first small and needy tribes funding increase in 1994 with a report to Congress entitled "The Tribal Budget System - Preliminary Assessment of Most Needy Small Tribes." The task force's recommendation resulted in a FY 1995 appropriation of $2 million to 100 small and needy tribes. Congress also appropriated $4 million in FY 1997 that was shared by 160 of the 310 small and needy tribes. The Bureau considers this initiative as a high priority and continues to include funding requests for small and needy tribes in the annual budgets it presents to Congress.