Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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For Immediate Release: February 6, 1997
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Strengthening local tribal programs, Indian education, and critical infrastructure projects are among the key components of the Fiscal Year 1998 Bureau of Indian Affairs' $1.73-billion budget request.

"This budget represents an increase of $127 million above the 1997 level to meet basic tribal priority needs. I want to emphasize that this budget reflects very low BIA administrative costs," said Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Ada E. Deer. "The entire administrative budget of the Bureau constitutes less than ten percent of its operating budget. I am proud to say that this administrative overhead is among the lowest in the federal government and allows more than 90 percent of funds to be delivered directly to the tribes."

Tribal Priority Allocations (TP A), which are the tribes' chosen spending priorities, are funded at $7 57 .3 million, an increase of $76.5 million over 1997. TPA is used for basic necessities such as tribal courts, law enforcement, housing repairs, social services, and adult vocational training. TP A programs comprise approximately one-half of the operating budget.

"The increase to TPA will allow tribes to collectively maintain an additional 1,250 miles of reservation roads," said Deer. "It also will allow tribes to hire another 400 law enforcement staff members, to repair an additional 75 homes for needy families, and to fund an additional 220 child welfare cases each month."

The Indian Education budget request for School Operations is $467 million and represents a $16.8-million increase over 1997 in order to meet a 3,000-student increase that is anticipated between now and the 1998-99 school year. The additional funds also are necessary so that the 185 BIA schools can maintain accreditation and provide safe transportation for an expected 52,400 Indian children. The budget also includes an additional $3 million for the 24 tribally controlled community colleges funded by the BIA.

To help meet infrastructure needs, the bureau requests $125.1 million for construction, which includes $49.2 million for education construction. Currently BIA schools require $475 million to bring them up national standards. Education construction includes $14 million to replace the Many Farms School in Arizona, which now has numerous safety problems that could endanger students. An additional $8 million is requested for various school facility improvement and repair projects. Because of overcrowded conditions at the Ute Mountain Ute Detention Facility in Colorado cited in a recent consent decree, the Bureau has requested $9.1 million for construction of a replacement facility. The budget also includes a $22-million request to repair structural deficiencies on high hazard dams on reservations. The total need for hazardous dam repair exceeds $400 million.

To fulfill requirements related to the federal Indian trust responsibility, an increase of $7.8 million is requested for critical programs such as environmental cleanup, water-rights studies and negotiations, and the Indian land title program.