Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Unprecedented attacks in Congress on American Indians programs demonstrate a reckless disregard for the federal government's deep and historic legal responsibilities to Indian Tribes. Yesterday, the Interior Appropriations conferees proceeded to gut the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the federal agency most responsible for fulfilling the Federal Indian Trust Responsibility. The conferees cut a full 26 percent from the Bureau's Central Office function, compromising the capacity of the agency to perform its mission, provide executive direction, and conduct oversight. With the 28-percent cut in the Area Offices, the Bureau will not be able to provide adequate levels of technical support to the tribes.

"The conferees have crippled the Bureau of Indian Affairs," said Ada E. Deer, Assistant Secretary of lndian Affairs. "It is unrealistic to expect the Bureau of Indian Affairs to carry out its trust and other o ligations without adequate resources." While several conferees attempted to restore funding to tribal accounts to support essential tribal, services, such as law enforcement, child welfare, so · al services, fire protection and senior citizen services, in the end the effort failed to achieve the level of restoration needed. The conferees reduced these critical tribal programs (Tribal Priority Allocations) by $110 million, or 15 percent below the current level.

Among the losers in the budget battle were Indian schoolchildren. Conferees did not restore any of the $32 million cut by the Senate for elementary and secondary education despite an anticipated 4 percent growth in student enrollment. Neither did the conferees provide funds to address the $600-million backlog in Indian school construction and repairs including safety violations. Deer said, "Apparently the conferees do not care whether Indian children are educated in unsafe, overcrowded schools."

Senator Slade Gorton (R-W A) was successful in maintaining a special provision singling out certain tribes within the State of Washington for monetary sanctions if the tribes fail to negotiate with competing private interests, notwithstanding the strong opposition of Congressman Sidney Yates (D1IL) and Senator Patty Murray (D-WA).