Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Under Secretary Frank A. Bracken said today the Department of the Interior already has begun correcting problems identified in a just released Senate report on Indian Affairs, and will continue cooperative efforts with the Congress and the Tribes to improve programs

"The Bush Administration is strongly committed to providing all services and benefits due American Indians by treaty, law and tradition, Bracken said after receiving a copy of the report from the Senate Special Committee on Investigations. "As the committee report shows, quite clearly the Federal Government in the past has not been as efficient, as careful or as caring as it should have been in a number of instances."

Bracken noted that in an appearance before the committee early this year, Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan pledged he would make changes as needed

"We have not waited for the committee report to institute improvements," Bracken said. "The Bureau of Indian Affairs the Minerals Management Service and the Bureau of Land Management have taken actions to improve their programs serving tribes and individual Indians Our agencies will continue conferring with tribes and with the Congress on the best ways of addressing the problems, including legislative solutions."

Noting that the Department of the Interior has cooperated fully with the committee throughout its investigation, the Under Secretary said "We view it as helpful and beneficial that the committee has focused attention on long-standing problems in various programs. We hope this will enhance our potential for making progress on some complex problems that have defied resolution for decades."

Bracken, who serves as the Department's coordinator to work with the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, said that Secretary Lujan Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Eddie Brown, Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management David O'Neal, Bureau of Land Management Director Cy Jamison and Minerals Management Service Director Barry Williamson are committed to doing everything within their power to meet the federal obligations to American Indians.

"Consistent with the long-standing policy of Indian Self Determination, we will consult with the tribes on all of the issues," Bracken said. "To be successful, we will need the help and cooperation of the Congress and the tribes."

In meeting with the media shortly after release of the report, Bracken stressed: "We are not here to explain why things have not worked in the past, but what can be done to assure that programs work better in the future."