Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Kenneth L. Payton, former deputy director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Albuquerque area office, received the Distinguished Service Award of the Department of the Interior today in a ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Interior Secretary James Watt made the presentation to Payton "in recognition of 32 years of outstanding leadership and superior performance in service to the Indian people and the Bureau of Indian Affairs."

Payton, a Cherokee Indian born in Picher, Oklahoma, retired in 1982, after a year in Washington, D.C. serving as the acting deputy assistant secretary and the top official in charge of BIA.

A graduate of Oklahoma State University, Payton joined the Bureau as a soil scientist in 1950. He spent most of his career working with the tribes of New Mexico. He was the superintendent of the Mescalero Apache agency from 1961 till 1966 when he was appointed superintendent of the huge United Pueblos agency.

He was elected by his peers to be the first chairman of BIA's National Superintendents' Committee.