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For Immediate Release: August 11, 1981
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Interior Assistant Secretary Ken Smith told Indian leaders meeting in Billings, Montana, August 11, that he would be heading up a Cabinet Council working group responsible for developing an Indian policy for the Reagan Administration.

Addressing the 9th annual convention of the National Tribal Chairman's Association, Smith said that Interior Secretary James Watt was responsible for elevating the Indian issue "to the Cabinet Council level, only one step away from the Presidential decision level."

Robert Carleson, a special assistant to the President for policy development, will be the principal White House representative on the working group, Smith said. The chaired working group would be a sub-unit of the Cabinet Council on Human Resources, by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Richard S. Schweiker. The group would include representatives from six Federal departments: Health and Human Services, Justice, Housing and Urban Development, Agriculture, Education and Labor.

"I believe this development alone," Smith said, "re-emphasizes Secretary Watt's desire -- and that of President Reagan -- to keep Indians in the mainstream of our society during this administration."

Smith is a Wasco Indian from the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon. As general manager of the Confederation of Warm Springs Tribes, he was responsible for the development of a very successful timber industry and other tribal enterprises.

Smith stressed throughout his talk his belief in the ability of tribal governments to manage their own affairs with less dependency on the Federal government. He said, "I believe the proper role of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the other Federal agencies is to encourage and foster an atmosphere that will enable tribal government to move toward less dependency on the Federal Government."

Speaking of a BIA policy to consult with tribal leaders, Smith said: "It would be totally inconsistent with my strong belief in self-determination for Indian tribal governments to fail to recognize the value and necessity of a well-designed, formal consultation process -- as well as frequent, informal consultation. We want your recommendations." But he added, "Consultation must not mean that we ask your permission to make a decision. We cannot, and will not, abdicate our management responsibility. "

Smith said that past Federal funding of reservation projects was not always helpful. "Money has been wasted in programs that were not thought out well, not integrated into any reservation plan and, consequently, had no lasting effect." He said that he was working to coordinate Indian programs from the various Federal agencies, but added: "The tribal governments now are challenged to come up with better ideas, better planning and better management. Their enterprises and development programs should be worth the investment of tribal capital and sound enough to attract funding the private sector."

Smith promised the tribal leaders, "I will "Work with you . . . to help you build strong tribal governments and well-managed economic development programs." He said that those working in Indian

Affairs could achieve their goals only to the extent that they helped Indian tribes reach their goals of self-determination and self-sufficiency.
