Media Contact: Lovett 202/343-7445
For Immediate Release: July 23, 1981
Print PDF

Interior's Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Ken Smith told Indian leaders and state and federal government officials that Indian tribal governments have "the primary responsibility for the social and economic well-being of the people on their reservations."

Smith, speaking at a workshop in Scottsdale, Arizona on the provision of human services on reservations, said that though the Bureau of Indian Affairs provides assistance to tribes, the principal duties remain with the tribe's government.

"They must provide the decisions and leadership necessary for a reservation's productive future. That is a function the BIA cannot -- and should not -- attempt to do."

Smith said the federal government in the next few years would be diminishing its role in state and local governmental affairs -- including those of tribal governments. The reduction in federal presence, he said, would occur in direction, regulation and funding. Strong, local government is essential, under these conditions, Smith said, for the efficient and capable delivery of governmental services.

Though many Indian tribes are still struggling to acquire the management and financial skills necessary for the administration of any government, Smith said he planned to encourage tribal administration of programs presently run by the BIA. He said assistance with bookkeeping and managerial functions would be provided the smaller tribes, but administrative standards would not be lowered. "We will work with tribal governments to succeed, because they must make their own decisions, set their priorities and plans for the future."

The workshop was sponsored by the Arizona Inter-Tribal Council, the Arizona Department of Economic Security and the Western States Policy Office.