Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Lovett 202/343-7445
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Kenneth L. Smith, a Wasco Indian from Oregon, became the nation's top Indian official May 15 when he was sworn in by Interior Secretary James Watt as the Department's Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs. Smith is the third American Indian to hold that position, which was established in 1977.

At the swearing in ceremony Smith said that it was his intention and that of Secretary Watt to further self determination for Indian tribal groups.

Interior Under Secretary Don Hodel told Interior employees at the ceremony that Smith was chosen for the job, after consultation with tribal leaders, because of his outstanding record of economic development on his own Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon. Smith has been the general manager of the Confederated Warm Springs Tribes for the past 10 years.

Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield testified at Smith's confirmation hearings that he "has utilized his managerial and organizational skills to make the (Warm Springs) reservation a model of economic success with more than 1,000 persons employed and an annual payroll of more than $10 million."

In addition to directing the operations of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Smith will be involved in the shaping of United States policy on Indian matters.

Smith grew up on the Warm Springs Reservation and received his degree in business administration from the University of Oregon in 1959 before returning to the reservation as an accountant for the Confederated Tribes. He later became controller and assistant general manager before his appointment as general manager in 1971.

He was a member of a task force on reservation development for the Congressionally mandated American Indian Policy Review Commission. He has been a director of the American Indian Travel Commission and the Intertribal Timber Council. He has also served on the Oregon State Board of Education and the Board of Directors of the Portland Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco.

At his confirmation hearings Smith stressed the need for strong, stable tribal governments. He said that U.S./Indian relationships will be "stronger and more meaningful when Indian tribal governments are strong and stable and less dependent on Federal funds for operation of their government programs."