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Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay today announced that the Bureau of Indian Affairs on or before June 15 will conduct a poll by mail among members of the Choctaw Tribe of Oklahoma in order to have an expression of their views regarding the selection of a principal chief. The term of the present principal chief expires June 30.

The polling will include two major groups of adult Choctaws: (1) surviving members whose names appear on the final roll of the Tribe compiled in accordance with a 1907 statute, and (2) the heirs of deceased members included on this roll. The Indian Bureau estimates that there are approximately 50,000 tribal members including both adults and minors.

The Bureau's questionnaire is designed to bring out the views of the tribal membership on five main topics, One is whether the Office of Principal Chief should be continued after June 30, 1954. The second asks whether the Chief should be selected by the Secretary of the Interior after a secret vote among tribal members by mail or a secret ballot at the polls, The third raises the question whether the Chief should be appointed by the Secretary without a vote of the tribal members. The fourth asks whether the Chief should be paid for his services. The fifth gives the voter an opportunity to express his preference concerning the rate of salary and expenses for the Chief. Under present regulations the Chief receives an annual salary of $3,000 and an expense allowance paid from Choctaw tribal funds.

The questionnaire also gives each voter an opportunity to designate his choice of a candidate to fill the office after June 30. If the decision is made to continue the office, an election will subsequently be held involving the two candidates receiving the highest number of votes on the questionnaire.

In a message addressed to the tribal members accompanying the questionnaire, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Glenn L. Emmons pointed out that the term of the present Principal Chief, Harry J.W. Belvin, was extended through June 30 so that the Indian Bureau staff would have an opportunity to study the need for a continuation of the Office. Since the salary and expenses of the Principal Chief are paid from tribal funds on deposit in the United States Treasury, Commissioner Emmons added, members of the tribe should have an opportunity to express their views on the questions under study and their answers will be helpful to the Bureau staff in reaching final decisions.

Under present law the President of the United States is given the authority to appoint a Principal Chief for the Choctaws, This authority, however, has been delegated to the Secretary of the Interior.