Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: January 24, 1956
Print PDF

Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay announced today that, in accordance with a decision jointly reached by Commissioner of Indian Affairs Glenn L. Emmons and himself, a three-man departmental committee has been appointed to hold hearings in the State of Washington beginning February 13 on the controversial Yakima tribal election held last December 6.

To give all tribal members full opportunity for expressing their views, the hearings will be held in six different localities. Starting on February 13 at Yakima, the committee will move on the following day to White Swan, and then on succeeding days to Satus and Toppenish. Additional hearings will be held in Tacoma, February 18 and Seattle, February 19.

William V. Kastler, Acting Assistant Solicitor, Indian Legal Activities, will serve as chairman of the hearing committee. The other two members are George Robinson, Assistant to the Administrative Assistant Secretary and Newton w. Edwards, Staff Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Public Land Management.

The central question involved in the hearings is whether the Secretary should formally recognize the tribal council elected at a meeting held on the Yakima Reservation last December 5 or whether another election should be called at a later date by the Secretary.

Election of the tribal council was originally scheduled for July 15, 1955. Since a quorum was not present at that time, the date was later set as November 29 and notices to this effect were widely circulated to tribal members both on and off the reservation. Members living off the reservation emphasized the importance of holding the election before winter weather made travel to the reservation difficult or hazardous.

At a general meeting of the tribal members held on the reservation November 28, it was decided to postpone the council election for one week because a member of the council had died the preceding weekend and his funeral had not yet been held. Since this postponement created serious problems for tribal members who had planned to come to the reservation from places such as Seattle and Tacoma to take part in the election, Commissioner Emmons wrote the tribal chairman suggesting further postponement of the election until April 17 1956. This, he emphasized would provide adequate time for employed members living off the reservation to arrange for participation and would also permit fuller attendance because of improved travel conditions. The Commissioner agreed in the interim to give full recognition to the then existing tribal council.

On December 6, however, the tribal members still present proceeded with the election of a council. Because of the intense controversy which has developed among tribal members over this election Secretary McKay and Commissioner Emmons reached the decision that hearings should be held and recommendations submitted by an impartial committee before determining whether a Secretarial election should be conducted.