Public Housing Administration

Media Contact: Housing and Home Finance Agency
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The Oglala Sioux of Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota, will be the first Indian Tribe to develop low-rent public housing since the local- federal program began nearly 25 years ago, Public Housing Commissioner Marie C. McGuire announced today.

Interest expressed by this tribe in the early weeks of the Kennedy Administration will shortly lead to the signing of a preliminary loan contract with PHA and the Local Housing Authority established by the Indians.

Under the contract, PHA will lend $30,000 for the planning of 150 low rent homes to be built on the reservation. In the first phase of the development it is planned to construct 50 units in Pine Ridge.

The Oglala Sioux Housing Authority has submitted an approvable program for community improvement to Housing Administrator Robert C. Weaver. This program is a prerequisite to federal assistance in community development.

The Oglala Sioux were the first of many tribes seeking federal assistance to better their housing conditions.

The Indians' housing program now being started, according to Mrs. McGuire, is part of a program to carry out President Kennedy's expressed goal of "…providing for the housing needs of all segments of our population."

In announcing the first step in the program -- the loan to the Oglala Sioux -- Mrs. McGuire made this statement:

“I am disappointed and surprised that the public housing program was not adapted to the housing needs of Indian communities, or apparently even seriously considered, until the Kennedy Administration took office. Our preliminary economic and technical surveys have revealed what all observers of the Indian scene in this country have long known -- that many reservation Indians are living under appalling conditions of utter privation.

“Many of the Oglala Sioux, for example, are obliged to weather the sub-zero temperature of South Dakota in self-made log huts and tents. No American in our country, which has the highest living standards in the world, should be forced to live under such conditions."

In launching the Indian housing program, Commissioner McGuire emphasized that in addition to working closely with tribal leaders" the Public Housing Administration will consult with Indian experts to create housing peculiarly adaptable to the various tribes involved. For one thing, Mrs. McGuire said, if the Indians so desire, efforts will be made to follow architectural design to conform to traditional

patterns of the tribe. For another, efforts will be made to employ Indian labor in construction to better the tribal economy while supplying the desired housing.

The FHA has been offered the full cooperation of the Indian Bureau, the Department of Labor and other government agencies in working out economically feasible programs for the various reservations.

"Depending upon local interest and initiative," said Commissioner McGuire, "our organization is prepared to assist our Indian citizens 'in meeting the housing needs of their low income families."