Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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It gives me special pleasure to announce, on behalf of the President, the nomination of Mr. Louis R. Bruce of New York State to be the new Commissioner of Indian Affairs. His biography is being passed out to you. As an enrolled member of the Sioux Tribe, Mr. Bruce has continually demonstrated his leadership among American Indians during a long and distinguished career.

He is a man of unparalleled qualifications, with the leadership and the desire necessary to carry out the Administration's pledge to bring dignity, education and economic progress to all of our American Indian citizens. Mr. Bruce's extensive experience in Indian activities, in community and youth relations, and in Indian housing programs will provide a solid foundation for advancing our programs to assure that the Indian American is no longer the forgotten American.

I have spent more than a quarter of a century in Alaska, where the native Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts comprise a substantial part of the population. I know them. I have been involved in their problems, and I have a personal commitment to help bring these native peoples into the mainstream of American life.

We have already begun that process with a bill now before the Senate Interior Committee to resolve one of the problems that has been hanging for a long time - full and final settlement of all Native Land Claims against the United States in Alaska.

I have directed Mr. Bruce to put into effect a re-structuring of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to make the Bureau fully responsive to today's needs of the Indian peoples.

I am determined to wipe out any bureaucratic restrictions which prevent participation in decision-making by the Indians themselves.

To assure maximum responsiveness to Indian thinking, an all-Indian Advisory committee, representative of all parts of the country will be selected. This body will advise the Secretary and the new Commissioner on implementing programs to achieve the ultimate objectives of the Indian people.

This Administration intends to listen to the American Indian. Too often the Government: has attempted to "solve" the problem of the, Indian simply by ignoring him. Our Indian citizens should have the opportunity to live in dignity and self-determination, They have the right to plan their own destiny.

We do not promise instant solutions to problems that have existed for 145 years - since the BIA was founded - but I can assure you that action will begin.