

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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STEPS TAKEN TO IMPROVE OPERATIONS OF THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

After consulting with representatives of the Indian community, Richard S. Bodman, Assistant Secretary--Management and Budget, today announced several steps to improve the operations of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the U. S. Department of the Interior.

Immediate measures being taken are:

1. Realign the Bureau of Indian Affairs Central Office functions in all its locations (principally Washington, Albuquerque and Denver) to accomplish the following purposes:
 - a. Transfer daily operational activities from the Central Office to area and agency offices;
 - b. Reduce non-essential support staff in the Central Office; and
 - c. Focus attention on the need for carrying out our trust responsibilities and for providing policy guidance for delivery of other services to Indians.
2. Use existing authority to transfer all responsibility for Indian affairs to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs as a first line officer reporting directly to the Secretary and propose legislation to upgrade the position of Commissioner to that of Assistant Secretary.
3. Include in next year's program and budget request an appropriation for BIA block grants to federally-recognized Indian tribes and propose supporting authorization legislation.

In realigning the operations of the Bureau, Bodman said daily operational activities presently performed in the Central Office would be transferred to area and agency offices. "This will place increased reliance on area and agency offices with headquarters removed from all direct operations," he said.

"Second, as a result of this transfer, we plan to reduce the number of authorized positions in the Central Office to a commensurate level. We estimate that the revised workload of the Central Offices can be carried out by an authorized permanent employment level of 715 people -- approximately 600 positions fewer than authorized in the fiscal 1973 budget. In addition, we intend to transfer 50 positions out of the Central Office to the field.

(over)

As our actual employment is now substantially less than our authorized ceiling, actual employment in the Bureau will be reduced by about 285 persons."

Mr. Bodman said the positions provided to the field offices would enhance capability in the area of tribal operations, real property management, and comprehensive planning. The funding for the positions abolished in headquarters will remain available to the Bureau and will be used for direct services to the Indian people.

"Third, we plan to separate responsibility for carrying out our Indian Trust obligations from responsibility for carrying out delivery of services to the Indian community. To do so, we will establish separate offices to carry out each of these duties," he added.

Mr. Bodman said Secretary Morton, using existing authorities, is transferring the responsibility for Indian affairs formerly held by the Assistant Secretary for Public Land Management, now held by the Assistant Secretary--Management and Budget, to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. "This will establish the Commissioner of Indian Affairs as a first line officer reporting directly to the Secretary," he added.

At the same time, the Secretary will propose new legislation to Congress to upgrade the position of Commissioner to Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs.

Continuing, Bodman said as another important step in the implementation of President Nixon's July 1970 proposals to Congress, legislation will soon be submitted to the Congress to enable the Bureau of Indian Affairs to provide block grants to federally-recognized tribes to carry out development projects as provided in tribally-prepared plans.

"Included in the proposed Bureau 1974 program and budget request is an appropriation of \$25 million for this purpose," he said. These funds are to be used for projects such as: water, sewer and other utility systems; industrial and commercial parks and facilities; streets and access road construction; water pollution control facilities for treatment of industrial waste; tourist and recreational facilities; harbor facilities; education and training facilities; health, community and cultural centers; airport facilities; and natural resource and related human resource development.

"This program will replace the program for Indians which has been carried out by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) of the Department of Commerce in the past, but will only affect new starts. Current EDA commitments will be honored." Mr. Bodman said.

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