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INTERIOR SUPPORTS BILLS TO INCREASE INDIAN ADULT VOCATIONAL TRAINING FUNDS

The Department of the Interior said today it has asked Congress to enact legislation to increase by $3 million the authorization for a program of adult vocational training for Indians administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Several identical bills pending in Congress call for raising the annual operating funds from the present $12 million to a new high of $15 million.

The program, which began in 1958, is designed to help increase the employability of Indian men and women. It is open to those between 18 and 35 years old.

The Bureau has contracted with more than 100 public and private vocational education institutions throughout the Nation to provide training in a wide range of occupations for which skilled help is in demand. All expenses of trainees are met by the Bureau during the training period, including costs of moving and maintaining families of those trainees who are family heads. Jobs are found for those who complete training and aid is provided in establishing them in new communities.

Nearly 10,000 Indians have been placed in permanent technical and other skilled work since inception of the program. Over 2,000 now are in training. In addition to institutional education, the program also provides on-the-job-training.

In a report to the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, the Department said:

> "The funds that have been available for this activity have not been sufficient to furnish vocational training to all of those Indians who are in need of and desire such training. At the present time, there is a backlog of nearly 5,000 applicants, both family heads and individuals.
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> "Needless to say, more and more of the younger Indian people are completing high school and will become available for these services in the near future. If the present trend continues with respect to requests for services under this program, a further backlog will develop."

Commissioner of Indian Affairs Philleo Nash has expressed concern that the backlog of applications may deter some Indians from persisting in efforts to increase their earning power through occupational training.

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