

MORRIS THOMPSON APPOINTMENT LAUDED

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—Effective Sunday, Morris Thompson became the first Alaska Native

to be Alaska Area Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The appointment of Thompson, 31, to the post has drawn more praise from Alaskans in Washington than any other event

in recent months.

As Special Assistant to Interior Secretary Walter J. Hickel, Morris Thompson has been instrumental in making the federal government more responsive to

the needs of Indians.

Born to the late Warren Thompson and Alice Thompson in Tanana, he attended Tanana Day School and graduated from Mt. Edgecumbe High School in

1959.

After studying 2½ years at the University of Alaska, Thompson attended the RCA Institute in Los Angeles and graduated

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as an electronics technician.

He worked in this capacity at the Gilmore Creek Satellite Tracking facility near Fairbanks until January of 1967, when Governor Hickel appointed him as Deputy Director of the Rural Development Agency and, subsequently, as Executive Secretary of the NORTH Commission.

Morris Thompson became Special Assistant to Secretary Hickel in June of 1969 and sought the BIA area directorship following Hickel's dismissal.

His interest in Alaska Native Affairs is reflected in his past involvement as Chairman of the Board of the Fairbanks Native Association, and as Secretary-Treasurer of the incorporating board of the Alaska Village Electrification Cooperative.

Thompson is married to Thelma Mayo of Rampart and Fairbanks. Thelma is the great granddaughter of the well-known "Cap" Mayo of Rampart.

The couple has two children. Sheryl will be five in March and Nicole is one year old.

In an interview with the Tundra Times during his last hour on the job in the Interior Secretary's office, Director Thompson discussed the changing role of the BIA in Alaska.

"The real role of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Alaska is to be of technical assistance to the Natives of Alaska," he stated.

"The largest event that is going to happen will be the tremendous change in Native Affairs in Alaska.

"This will require a whole new look at the types of services that the Bureau can provide," Thompson said.

He said that the needs of Native Alaskans must be considered in shaping the role of the BIA in Alaska.

"We must see that the personal and human needs of the people are met," Thompson stated.

The new director envisions a place for the BIA in the massive adjustments that must be made when a settlement of the Alaska Native land claims is reached.

"We have to look to see how the BIA can relate to the post-settlement period," he said.

"The Bureau will assist Native groups in the consideration of the post-settlement plans that are brought up. This is one of my main objectives," added Thompson.

The director indicated that he was especially pleased with the degree of leadership exercised by a great and increasing number of Alaska Natives.

"I have a good feeling about working with Alaska Natives who have the interest of their clientele at heart," he said.

When questioned with regard to the desire of some persons and congressmen to terminate the BIA in Alaska, Thompson said that it was essential to have more consultation with Alaska Native communities to really see what their desires are.

He added that consultation of this sort must be made to

determine whether services currently provided by the bureau should be transferred to either the state or Native groups.

Thompson noted that the contract for operation of the Southeastern Area office by the Tlingit and Haida Central Council "should be ready for signature fairly soon."

Asked whether there was any foundation to the rumor that the Alaska Area office of the BIA would move from Juneau to Fairbanks, Thompson responded, "I don't think the move is seriously being considered at this time."

The new director was then asked whether the Bureau has come under the control of urban Indians and whether such control might be detrimental to the operations of the BIA in rural areas of Alaska.

"The Commissioner has gathered together a balanced team of new leadership in the BIA, which is a very positive thing.

"The top administrative positions are held by young, aggressive Indians from all sectors of the Indian community, most of whom I know on a first name basis, and these include Native Alaskans," said Thompson.

One problem area encountered in the past with the Bureau has been the slow communications between the BIA in Alaska and the Washington office. Director Thompson was asked what might be done about it.

He replied that his experience with the Interior Department in Washington could be valuable in that he is able to understand how the Bureau operates and he has grown to know most key personalities.

"If this communications problem exists, my experience will hopefully help alleviate it," Thompson stated.

He points with well deserved pride to his experience with the FNA in Fairbanks, the Governor's Office in Juneau, and the experience on a national level with many of the Bureau's new team.

"My government experience has taught me how to work within the system to make that system work better for Alaska Natives," he added.

"My family and I are anxious to get back to Alaska and our friends. I look forward to meeting with Native organizations and to trying to bring greater understanding between state and federal governments in Alaska.

"I am tremendously pleased to go back and do my part in helping with this area of great interest and look forward to working very closely with all people in the Alaska Native movement.

"My door will be open to all Natives and non-Natives," Thompson concluded.

Morris Thompson and his wife Thelma left Washington Sunday for a cross-country car trip to California.

There they will visit friends, drive to Vancouver, catch the ferry Wickersham, and arrive in Juneau in time for him to begin work on February 25.