

Energy Crisis Evident at Thompson's Nomination

By RICHARD LA COURSE

WASHINGTON, D. C. — (AIPA) — People flocked to the Senate hearings here November 14 on the nomination of the Indian Commissioner-designate, Morris Thompson, attesting to the troubled state of Indian affairs and a widespread concern for the decline of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the collapse of morale among its 16,000 employees over the past year.

Although the post of the Indian Commissioner has been vacant since the firing of Louis R. Bruce last December 6, the national energy crisis prevailed over the BIA vacancy as a total of seven senators came and went from the hearing room as they were required to vote on a bill requiring mandatory fuel al-

locations for the nation on the Senate floor.

At times only one senator would be left in the hearing room to listen to and interrogate Thompson.

Testifying on the abilities and character of Thompson were Senator Mike Gravel, D-Alaska, Senator Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, Rep. Donald Young, D-Alaska, State Sen. John Sackett, D-Alaska, and Interior Secretary Rogers C. B. Morton.

Sen. James Abourezk, D-S.D., chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Subcommittee, chaired the overall session of the full Interior and Insular Affairs Committee.

Thompson himself fielded a host of large questions and responded with the broad outline of the projected charac-

teristics of his BIA administration.

He was grilled lengthily on whether he would "roll back the reorganization of the BIA", whether he intended to suggest Indians for the top positions during his tenure, whether there

(Continued on page 6)

Thompson Hearing...

(Continued from page 1)

were any pressures on him to name a specific individual to be his deputy commissioner, how he intended to reform the controversial Indian education program administration in the BIA and whether he or someone else would "actually be running the BIA." Thompson's major responses were these:

- On direct access to the Interior Secretary, Thompson said he would have this by reporting directly to Morton rather than as in the past through an intermediary;

- He had made "no commitments to any individual" for the position of deputy commissioner;

- He would not favor the BIA echelon of area directors but would "maintain levels of communication at all levels of the Bureau and with the Indian community";

- To stem an "exodus" of Indian career employees from the BIA he would "stabilize" an organization entity "with some integrity to work in."

Thompson said his administration, if confirmed, would first of all be responsive to Indian initiatives, he said. Then he would use the mechanism of consultation with tribal groups, intertribal associations and others, and would "hold hearings on all major changes" within the BIA.

His last and continuing effort, he pledged, would be to "maintain personal contacts with the Indian people themselves."

Other telling aspects of the Senate confirmation hearings on Thompson were these:

- A total of three persons who were also in the Commissioner sweepstakes with Thompson out of a total of nine attended the Senate hearings. These were Forrest Gerard, a Blackfeet and legal counsel to the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, Reaves Nahwooksy, Comanche and Indian affairs specialist at HUD; and Martin Seneca, a Seneca and former White House Fellow who is presently a law professor at the University of Utah.

- Testimonies of key senators and congressmen on the

nomination included massive indictments of the state of affairs and the level of moral in the BIA which Thompson will lead and attempt to spark if he is confirmed. Sitting in the room and listening without a visible reaction to those indictments was Harrison Loesch, former Assistant Interior Secretary for Public Land Management, immediate overseer of the BIA who was fired with Bruce last December, and who is now minority counsel to the Senate Interior Committee.

- Potential opponents of Thompson from within the BIA and Interior were also in evidence, confiding their criticism and disappointment with the drift of Thompson's testimony to newsmen and friends, boding a possible source of fresh opposition from within that agency a factor, responsible in the demise of Louis R. Bruce and his caretaker successor, Marvin L. Franklin.