

Reagan on Indian health

Is the Reagan administration (as articulated by party-line simulacrum at the Office of Management and Budget) out to bury the Indian Health Service? Or, are recent OMB moves to offset direct Federal support of IHS with other kinds of income merely the actions of benevolent government trying to bring reasonable modernization to the way in which IHS manages its programs? It depends on who in the Washington, D.C. crowd you happen to be speaking with.

One Congressional Indian Committee staffer will tell you OMB has unfriendly designs

on IHS. This person speaks of administration "ideologues" march-stepping around IHS Headquarters, openly sneering at the so-called "Trust Relationship" of the federal government toward American Indians and Alaska Natives. OMB, this nervous committee staffer asserts, "While acknowledging a certain legal validity to the trust relationship, does not treat it as sacred and, in fact, believes they can bring down the edifice of federal financial support for sovereign aboriginal nations before anyone can do anything about it in the courts."

If you happen to be speak-

ing with a highly placed bureaucrat within Indian Health Service, you might hear similar tales of ignominy. This informant said the administration's financial squeeze play isn't even being done to save money . . . In fact, this person asserts the administration is willing to spend a little more money in order to achieve their No. 1 goal . . . getting the federal government out of the direct provision of health and social services.

If you happen to be speaking with a Health Resources and Services Administration bureaucrat you will hear there is no villainy intended. It will

be asserted that modern management practices have not yet visited IHS; that IHS is terribly inefficient; that what is happening is simply getting rid of the fat . . . making IHS accountable.

As a matter of fact, IHS has not taken the hard shots that other federal health and social programs have experienced. This may be partly because most of IHS is physically situated in the conservative West. IHS long enjoyed the open support of such noted congressional conservatives as Barry Goldwater and Ted Stevens. It may also be because Reagan has a "John Wayne"

image of himself . . . on his ranch . . . playing Cowboys and Indians . . . and it's awfully hard to be a cowboy if there aren't any Indians around to play with. Hence, the relative security of IHS, as compared to other social programs.

On the other hand, David Stockman, chief "ideologue" of OMB has recommended an IHS budget for FY 1984 that is \$218 million less than the recommendation of Congress.

If you believe the separate parts of something as vast as the federal government may not always "know" what the other is doing . . . maybe all the versions are true.

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