

Indian leaders rap Reagan policy

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — American Indian leaders said Wednesday that the Reagan administration pays lip service to Indian self-determination while cutting programs that would allow them to become self-reliant.

In a report by the National Tribal Chairmen's Association, representing the leaders of 166 of the 283 Indian tribes in the United States, the administration was criticized for denying Indians a voice in their future and cutting funds for vital Indian programs.

"During the period from 1965 through 1980, the Indian tribes and the Alaska Natives were offered the greatest opportunities in their history for community and social progress with federal assistance," the tribal leaders said.

"Great strides were made in this short period, and the future looked fairly bright . . .

"Suddenly, in early 1981, those opportunities began to disappear and progress came to a halt. Within two years, the delivery of services by federal agencies to Indians was in a shambles."

The tribal leaders said as a result, chronic unemployment has intensified, suicide and alcoholism have become rampant, hunger and poverty have increased, and health care is disappearing.

An administration spokesman denied that the Interior Department has ignored Indian concerns. Carl Shaw, a spokesman for the department's Bureau of Indian Affairs, said the administration "has consulted more (with Indian leaders)

than any other administration in the history of the bureau."

But he acknowledged cuts in Indian programs.

"The cuts in the federal budget have affected every segment of the population," he said. "Indians are no exception, and we have had to take our share of cuts."