

Bureau Budget Reflects Contracting Preparations

By Karen Ducheneaux

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The Bureau of Indian Affairs hopes to contract out to Indian tribes, organizations, and individuals nearly \$159 million, or one-fourth of its \$634,682,000 appropriation request to the Congress for the coming fiscal year submitted by President Richard M. Nixon.

To achieve this end, a "new look" has been given to the BIA's budget for fiscal year 1975. In the categories of Education, Indian Services, Tribal Resource Development, General Management and Facilities Operations and Construction, a new line item has been added which reads "Direct Indian Operation."

The dollars shown next to the phrase are the amount of that program the BIA hopes to contract to Indians. Thus, the BIA is requesting \$219 million for Indian education. The BIA will control \$119,234,000 of that amount, and \$67,675,000 will go into "Direct Indian Education Operations" to be controlled by Indians through contracting.

Although for bookkeeping reasons, say BIA budget officials, "Direct Indian Operations" does not appear under the category of Road Construction, the BIA does hope to contract with Indians for \$3,486,000 of its fiscal year 1975 Road Construction operation.

The only BIA program area for which Indians will not be able to contract is Trust Responsibilities and Services, because

these programs involve the approval function over the disposition of trust assets - a function which has to be performed by an employee of the federal government.

Positioning

The new look of the BIA budget, coupled with the 10 percent rollback in BIA Area Office and Agency personnel announced by Indian Commissioner Morris Thompson on Jan. 7 are only attempts to "position" the BIA so that tribes which desire to do so will find it easier to contract to run BIA programs, insists the Nixon administration.

This "positioning" is stressed repeatedly in the new fiscal year budget. For example, under Education in the BIA budget one finds the following phrases:

"In accordance with the policy of self-determination, funds estimated for direct tribal operations but, at the discretion of the tribes, not used for direct Indian education operations, will be otherwise expended by the BIA to carry out programmed and budgeted work. If any tribe decides against contractual arrangement, the services which they would have otherwise received will not be terminated or diminished."

President Nixon in his January State of the Union message to the Congress also underscored this point, stating: "Looking forward, I shall ask that the BIA make specific plans to accelerate the transfer of significant portions of its programs

to Indian tribal management, although I repeat my assurance that, while accelerated, these transfers will not be forced on Indian tribes not willing to accept them."

Administrative Costs

It is also stressed by the Nixon administration and BIA budget officials that "appropriate administrative costs incurred by the tribe, organization or individuals in carrying out the work" will be included in that contract.

However, the ability of the BIA to include administrative

(Continued on page 5)

Bureau Prepares to Contract Services...

(Continued from Page 1)

overhead costs in those contracts with tribes is directly related to the projected 10 per cent personnel reduction, the BIA estimates that nearly \$20 million of the \$159 million it hopes to contract will be earmarked for those administrative overhead costs. This figure of \$20 million almost equals the amount of savings the BIA will realize from the 10 per cent reductions.

Aid to Tribal Government

Also included in the BIA's new budget request to the Congress is \$2.6 million which the BIA wants to contract to needy Indian tribes in order that they might upgrade their government-

al and managerial functions to enable them to take over BIA programs.

Legislation

Coupled with these administrative initiatives toward self-determination, is the new contracting authority to be given the BIA by legislation which should come forth from the Congress by this spring. This legislation eases some of the federal contracting regulations as they apply to Indian contracting of BIA and Indian Health Service programs, gives the BIA grant authority so it can give money to tribes to improve their governmental and managerial capabilities, and also provides that federal employees can be

supervised by tribal officials.

Denting Paternalism

Given these administrative and congressional initiatives toward Indian self-determination, it would appear that if a sizable dent is not made in the 200 years of federal paternalism over Indians, the Indians will only have themselves to blame. By all counts, it will be interesting to watch.

Increases

The BIA appropriation for fiscal year 1975 shows an increase over the current year of \$54,716,000. However, only about \$16 million of that increase will be available for new, expanded, or improved Indian programs.