

Indian News Notes

By VINCE LOVETT

BIA REORGANIZATION TASK FORCE IS NAMED: A United Press wire release said that the Department of the Interior announced (December 6) the "creation of a task force to shake up the Bureau of Indian Affairs." The release issued by the Secretary's office was more genteel. It said the task force was "to develop recommendations for the Secretary on the reorganization of the Bureau of Indian Affairs." The Federal Register for December 6 formally announced the establishment of the task force and also announced its first meeting to be held December 21 in Washington, D.C. At this first meeting a chairman will be chosen and areas of responsibility assigned to individual members. Many of the eleven members are not well known in Indian country. NCAI named Ray Goetting as their representative and Bill Youpee will represent NTCA. Assistant Secretary Forrest Gerard named two BIA employees, Jim Sansaver from the Billings Area Office and Ronald Toya of the Southern Pueblo Agency. Former Interior Secretary Stewart Udall was named as one of the six "public" members. Willie Hensley of NANA Regional Corporation, Kotzebue, Alaska and Lorraine Misiaszak of Advocates for Indian Education, Spokane, Wash., are also members. Others are Larry Meierotto, Interior's Acting Assistant Secretary for Policy, Budget and Administration; Robert J. Hampton, Arlington, VA; Ted Marston, Columbus, IN; Dr. Thomas Sawyer, Provo, Utah. Gerard is an ex-officio member. Jack Rushing, a member of Under Secretary James Joseph's staff, is the task force director.

FLAP OVER INDIAN-WHITE HOUSE MEETINGS: Confusion abounded when two different offices at the White House were involved in planning meetings with Indians. One result was a hot telegram signed by Joe DeLaCruz, NTCA; Veronica Murdock, NCAI; Sam DeLoria, American Indian Law Center, and Suzanne Harjo, Native American Rights Fund. In the telegram they complained that a meeting scheduled between the White House Government Reorganization Team (Tom Pettigrew) and 20 tribal leaders "has been cancelled without explanation. Now we are told by persons in the Special Interests Office (Marilyn Haft) that the only possibility for Indian consultation is our participation in meetings arranged by or with the American Indian Forum, an organization about which we know nothing and which has no apparent Indian constituency. 'Chief-making' is an ancient and dishonored government practice—to appoint chiefs acceptable to the government and tell the Indians that those chiefs represent their only voice." Pettigrew had scheduled a November 29 meeting with DeLaCruz, et al, which was called off but was being rescheduled for December 16 or 19. Haft, in the meantime, had been talking with American Indian Forum (See Below) leaders about a different meeting—held December 1 in the Rayburn Building on Capitol Hill.

AMERICAN INDIAN FORUM ESTABLISHED, HAS CAPITOL HILL MEETING: Approximately 135 persons attended a meeting to talk about Indian Affairs called by the American Indian Forum. Participants included Wendell Chino, Russell Means, LaDonna Harris and Louis Bruce. Former Commissioner Bruce gave as one reason for his presence that he wanted to find out who or what the American Indian Forum was. Jim Medina, a Cherokee from Oklahoma, opened the meeting. He said that AIF was a process whereby Indian voices could be heard—a function which existing national Indian organizations, he said, did not adequately provide. Tom Joseph, who was the second speaker and second vice president of AIF, said that the group was started with individual private funds, that it received no Government financial support. Co-founders and leaders of AIF, though it was never said explicitly, seem to be Thomasina Jordan and John Olquin. Jordan, who says she is Penobscot, obviously has White House connections. She arrived on the BIA Washington scene with the Carter administration, working briefly in the education office. Olquin, a Laquna Pueblo, worked in the BIA Policy and Planning Office and is now with the National Education Association. A variety of people spoke at the meeting, some as private individuals others as organization or agency officials. These latter included Patty Marks from the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, Andy Yankton from the Indian Desk for CETA at Labor, a deputy director of Action and a representative of the Democratic National Committee.