

**Around Washington -**

# **Indian News Notes**

**By VINCE LOVETT**

**Senate Committee sees Indian Preference Working to detriment of Indians:** The Senate Appropriations Committee, reporting on the appropriation bill for the Department of the Interior and related agencies, expressed strong criticism of the Indian Preference Act. The following is from the report: "The Committee has no reason to dispute the intent of the Indian Preference Act, but it fears the law is being misapplied to the point that it is retarding the delivery of Indian services. In its zeal to implement Indian preference, the Bureau has in some cases allowed positions to go vacant in the absence of a qualified Indian applicant. In other cases positions have been filled with unqualified or underqualified Indians. And there are instances where the placement of Indians in certain programs has created conflicts of interest. The result of this misapplication of a well-intentioned law is breakdown of employee morale and an undermining of program efficiency in the Bureau and departmental administrators, there is a decided reluctance to discuss it publicly. Apparently there is an even greater reluctance to do anything about improving the situation. The Committee calls on both Indian and departmental leadership to address the problems stemming from Indian preference publicly and candidly. Indian leaders in particular should become involved, for it is the Indian people who suffer most from misapplication of the law. Clearly, no law or policy that foster mismanagement should be defended or ignored. The Committee believes Indian programs as well as individual Indians only if it is prudently applied. A thorough and open appraisal of Indian preference regulations and policies will, the Committee is certain, develop badly needed remedies without impairing Indian involvement and Federal programs. The Department should pursue those remedies and, if necessary, propose legislative changes to implement them. Again, the real measurement of success should be the delivery of benefits to the Indian people."

**Supreme Court will review scope of Buy Indian Act -** The United States Supreme Court has agreed to review the scope of the Buy Indian Act. The Bureau of Indian Affairs has interpreted the Act as exempting the agency from some of the Federal competitive bidding requirements to give business to Indian-owned companies. The decision being appealed by the Government to the Supreme Court upheld a non-Indian construction company's challenge of a road construction contract. The Glover Construction Company (non-Indian) was not allowed to bid on a \$1.2 million contract awarded by the Bureau to the Indian Nations Construction Company. Both the Federal district court and appeals court ruled in Glover's favor, finding that the construction contracts should be governed by a 1949 law requiring competitive bidding in such programs. Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus initiated the appeal to the Supreme Court.

**NCAI Offices in Washington are moved:** The offices of the National Congress of American Indians in Washington, D.C. are scheduled to be moved December 1 to 202 E Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20002. The new offices are in the Capitol Hill vicinity.