

Battle Royal Bursts Over Bureau of Indian Affairs Cutbacks

By RICHARD LA COURSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. — (AIPA) — A battle royal has burst upon the Bureau of Indian Affairs over planned cutbacks in its next year's budget, and the BIA is sending out recorded tapes to explain the process to the tribes.

The politically charged cutbacks - most of them affecting the areas of education and wel-

fare assistance - burst like a bomb through Indian country in the first week of October. The cuts totalling nearly \$50 million were so extensive as to touch nearly every reservation in the nation.

A flurry of meetings by government officials, a presidential rebuke to the Bureau, an influx of Indian lobbying groups and a denial by the Interior Department followed disclosures of

secret Interior budget memoranda Sept. 29.

The BIA, meanwhile, prepared tapes explaining the budget process for play on the nation's reservations beginning the week of Oct. 18, as it became known Indian Commissioner Louis R. Bruce was fighting the cuts tooth and nail.

In a cautious interview Oct. 12, Bruce stated:

"We've never had enough

money to complete this job. We ought to be fighting to get as much as we can to correct our problems. I don't know how the budget system was set up. I do know I want Indian tribal people to understand the process. For that reason I did that tape. I also want them to feel we'll come back to see how it turned out from their level?"

How did Bruce square his duties to consult tribes on bud-

get questions under the 1934 Indian reorganization act with the secret offsets and cuts prepared one-sidedly for the White House under White House orders?

"It's part of the government," he said, "and I guess that's it. But I'm always optimistic. I think the more we can do to promote our position and our need, the more we can make the public - including the Indian public - understand the Indian situation, the better results we're going to get."

Both the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and the National Tribal Chairman's Association, meanwhile, responded strongly to disclosures of the pending fiscal slashes.

On Oct. 1 NCAI sent messages to 50 senators and congressmen on the Hill, alerting them to the budget bumps. Four days later, NCAI President Webster Two Hawk during a press conference in the National Press Club expressed grave concern over the "direct impact on our local tribal efforts" and praised Bruce for his "heroic stand in refusing to cut his budget at the Interior Department's request."

Two Hawk said payments on Alaska Native claims next year "means that the other tribes' budgets will be cut . . . BIA should have a special allocation from OMB as an add-on (appropriation) to pay off the (Alaska Native) claims bill."

In a separate interview Oct. 13, White House minority affairs assistant Bradley Patterson, Jr. conceded that the \$70 million slated for Alaska Native payments after next July 1 would leave Bruce's budget substantially diminished, as would an additional \$75 million reserved for new reservation road construction, and the rising inflation figure of five to seven per cent.

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