

Thompson Sworn In

By RICHARD LACOURSE

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After a long lull of nearly an exact full year, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) at last has a new Indian Commissioner appointed by the President, confirmed by the U.S. Senate, and formally sworn into office by the Secretary of the Interior.

Morris Thompson, 34, an Athabaskan Indian from Tanana, Alaska and the fifth Indian in history to head that troubled agency, was sworn into office here on the morning of Dec. 3 by Interior Secretary Rogers C.B. Morton, who personally had submitted Thompson's name to the White House on Sept. 11 as his personal choice to fill that vacant post.

Six days earlier the Senate had by "unanimous consent" confirmed Thompson in office following that recommendation from President Richard M. Nixon and a like recommendation from a voting quorum of the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee on Nov. 26, which was the Senate committee responsible for the review of the nomination.

On Monday, Dec. 3, Thompson took the following oath as Indian Commissioner:

"I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance

to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God."

Thompson was required to sign an appointment affidavit upholding the text of his oath, including affirmations that he was not participating nor would participate in any employee strike against the federal government, and that neither he nor anyone in his behalf had "given, transferred, promised or paid" anything in the expectation of receiving assistance in securing appointment as the Indian Commissioner.

Thompson thereby assumed all the responsibilities temporarily vested in Marvin L. Franklin, who this past Feb. 7 was appointed Assistant to the Interior

Secretary for Indian Affairs and who was at that time empowered with all the rights and responsibilities of the position of the Indian Commissioner by an Interior executive action called a "secretarial order." That order was rescinded on the morning of Dec. 3, just prior to the taking of the oath by Thompson. Franklin himself was expected to remain at the Interior Department to assist Thompson across a brief period of transition as Thompson took charge of the BIA. Then it is expected that Franklin, who now fills a role with advisory powers on Indian policy equivalent to those of his predecessor, Ms. Wilma Victor, will soon leave Interior altogether.

Welcoming Thompson aboard at Interior, Morton in a public statement declared he was confident Thompson would provide

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Morris

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the impetus to begin "a new era for American Indians. . . We want to work together with Indian people in accord with the President's historic message to the Congress in July 1970. The policy of this administration will continue to be one of advancing the opportunities of our Indian citizens for self-determination, without termination of the special federal relationship with recognized Indian tribes."