

REPORT ON BIA MODERNIZATION MEETING

A tribal leaders' meeting was held with Assistant Secretary Carl Artman in Washington, DC on Wednesday January 30, 2008 to discuss "Modernization Initiatives" at the Department of the Interior (DOI). The purpose of the meeting was to establish a framework for government-to-government discussions between tribal leaders and Interior, and to establish priorities for the DOI.

Key Outcomes

At the meeting, Mr. Artman and tribal leaders agreed to form a "Tribal Management Advisory Council" that will function somewhat like the Tribal Budget Advisory Committee. The key difference is that all tribal leaders are invited to participate. Each BIA region is asked to send at least one representative and an alternate to ensure regional representation, but meetings will be open to as many tribal representatives from each region as want to attend. Tribes should also prepare to do their own analysis of regional and local issues, and to submit their ideas for change on particular subject areas. Tribal leaders agreed that the work must get started as soon as possible. **The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for early March**, possibly following the NCAI Executive Council Winter Session in Washington, DC.

Meeting Summary

Assistant Secretary Artman and Deputy Assistant Secretary Majel Russell opened the meeting with statements regarding their views of the needs for BIA, which included an internal review of program offices and personnel to examine how "delivery of service" could be improved. They expressed the concern that many BIA offices are staffed with too many high-grade employees and much of the work that needs to be done is being passed down the line which causes backlogs. Their approach would be to use two (2) regions as "pilot" regions, and do on-site reviews and look at ways to stream-line the offices to better use existing resources. Russell and Artman stressed that while the BIA conducted its internal review to gather more information, a parallel process would be underway with tribal leaders working to identify their ideas for reform.

Tribal leaders worked to outline a number of priorities, and to also set timely deadlines for action to take place. Tribal leaders stressed the importance of developing an approach that would allow the work to continue when the Administration changes hands following the Presidential election next November. Suggestions included finding areas where quick, meaningful progress can be made, and establishing a structure that would institutionalize tribal involvement in the review and reform process.

The tribal leaders agreed that a Tribal Management Advisory Council should be created to provide direct input to DOI/BIA during the “modernization” process. Key components of the TMAC were outlined:

- Ask each Region to send a representative
- Inclusive – all tribes and tribal orgs can participate
- Include DOI participation
- Regions will develop their own recommendations
- Schedule meetings at convenient times around other tribal meetings
- Show some success during this Administration
- Keep it simple
- Implement decision making authority at local level
- Transparency and Communications
- Develop relationship with TBAC on budget issues

Focus areas were suggested in: **Human Resources, Land, Law Enforcement, Office of Special Trustee, Education, and Self-Governance**. These focus areas will provide long-term leadership on each area for “modernization” purposes:

- Goal is to make specific written recommendations for improvement of BIA services at reservation level
- Need tribal leadership
- Need to recruit technical experts
- Need BIA participants and experts – include regional/agency employees
- Need information and data from Interior Department
- Set deadlines to develop recommendations
- Review policies, procedures, regulations, statutes
- Convert recommendations to action

Tribal leaders and Assistant Secretary Artman agreed that there must be transparency in this process and that tribal members on the reservations and in the BIA offices must be engaged and helping the process.

For more information about this meeting, upcoming meetings, or to be included in the focus groups, please contact John Dossett (jdossett@ncai.org) or Daniel Cordalis (dcordalis@ncai.org).