



LM104781



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

RELEASED 2/21/78
FEB 08 1978

5279

B-114868

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd, Chairman
Subcommittee on the Department of
Interior and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On August 9, 1977, you requested that we make a comprehensive review of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, programs and processes and report the results to you by February 15, 1978. This is one of a series of reports in response to that request. This report presents the results of past work we have done concerning the effectiveness of Bureau coordination with other Federal agencies.

Following your request we met with your office and identified four General Accounting Office reports issued during 1975 and 1976 that recognized, among other things, the need for improved coordination among Federal agencies operating Indian programs. We agreed to respond to this portion of your request by providing copies of the reports identified and by doing limited followup work to determine what, if any, corrective action has been taken by the responsible agencies.

Following are brief summaries of our four reports. Corrective action has been taken or initiated on three of them. We are continuing to follow up on the fourth report and the results of that work will be reported separately.

On August 18, 1975, we issued a report to the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs on "Indian Natural Resources--Opportunities for Improved Management and Increased Productivity Part I: Forest Land, Rangeland, and Cropland" (RED-76-8), which was followed on March 31, 1976, by "Indian Natural Resources--Part II: Coal, Oil, and Gas--Better Management Can Improve Development and Increase Indian Income and Employment" (RED-76-84). These reports concluded that the Department of the Interior had not given Indians the necessary assistance to properly manage their natural resources and recommended that procedures be established among various responsible agencies and Indian tribes to coordinate reservation activities.

RESTRICTED -- Not to be released outside the General Accounting Office except on the basis of specific approval by the Office of Congressional Relations.

CED-78-47
(14583)

In November 1977 Bureau officials told us that the Department of the Interior had recently established an interagency task force to study irrigation management activities, which should address our concerns on Federal coordination. The task force is expected to complete its study in September 1978. Also, regarding our concern over the coordination of reservation reclamation activities, the recently passed Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 requires the Secretary of the Interior to submit proposed legislation allowing Indian tribes the option to assume full authority over surface mining. The Office of Surface Mining and Reclamation Enforcement will be responsible for coordinating reclamation matters.

On September 8, 1975, we issued a report to the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs on "Coordination Needed in the Award of Financial Aid to Indian Students" (MWD-76-14). We reported that there were conflicting philosophies between the Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and the Bureau in awarding financial aid to Indian students, and we concluded that the two agencies should develop solutions to the existing problems in conjunction with appropriate congressional committees.

Regulations were issued by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare on August 27, 1976 (45 C.F.R. § 176.15 (1976)), that provide for coordinating the student assistance programs of the two agencies for those Indian students eligible for both types of assistance.

On June 27, 1975, we reported to the Congress on "Improving Federally Assisted Business Development on Indian Reservations" (RED-75-371). Our report identified several major Federal agencies that provide assistance programs to Indians; namely, the Bureau, the Economic Development Administration, the Office of Minority Business Enterprises, the Farmers Home Administration, the Rural Development Service, and the Small Business Administration.

Our report stated that although some points of contact for Indian assistance had been established with the agencies, no formal mechanism had been formulated to coordinate overall planning, funding, and administration of Federal projects. Therefore, we recommended that the Director, Office of Management and Budget, propose to establish a domestic council committee on Indian affairs to coordinate program efforts. This committee would develop procedures for each agency to

B-114868

use in evaluating proposed business and commercial development projects and in providing timely monitoring of and competent technical assistance for businesses receiving Federal financing.

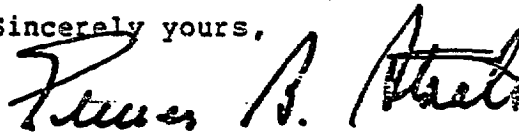
The Office of Management and Budget took no action since that report to establish a domestic council committee on Indian affairs. Its officials stated that they considered establishing such a committee to clarify the various Federal agencies' responsibilities but later decided against this. They took the position that coordination should take place at the reservation level.

Our Office is following up on the issues discussed in that report in response to the portion of your August 1977 request regarding the Bureau's economic programs. As previously mentioned, the results of that review will be issued to you separately.

Enclosed are five copies of each of the above mentioned reports. Our reports responding to your August 1977 request will, where applicable, identify those Bureau operations that have Federal coordination problems.

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 10 days from the date of the report. At that time, we will send copies to interested parties and make copies available to others upon request.

Sincerely yours,



Comptroller General
of the United States

Enclosures - 20