



National Congress of American Indians

NCAI News

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Special Trustee Resigns -- Tom Slonaker, who has served as Special Trustee for American Indians for the past two years, announced today that he has resigned his post. Donna Erwin, currently a deputy within the Office of the Special Trustee, will serve as acting Trustee.

The Office of Special Trustee, created under the Trust Fund Management Reform Act of 1994, was originally envisioned as an independent office, but was ultimately placed in a position subordinate to the Secretary of Interior at the insistence of Administration officials. Since that time, each successive Special Trustee has testified that their ability to perform the duties entrusted to them has been impaired by the office's lack of independence.

The Tribal/DOI Trust Reform Task Force is working to develop plans for trust reorganization, and tribal representatives have indicated that the key to success of any reorganization will be a component of oversight from a body that is truly independent of the Department. For more information about the Trust Reform Task Force, see NCAI's website at www.ncai.org or contact NCAI at (202)466-7767.

Senate Appropriations Committee Approves FY 2003 DOT Bill with \$10 Million IRR Cut –

On July 25, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved a FY 2003 Transportation Appropriations bill (S. 2808, S.Rpt. 107-224) that cuts \$10 million from the Indian Reservation Roads (IRR) program's current funding level.

For FY 2002, Congress provided \$279 million for IRR, including \$275 million for the Indian Reservation Roads program and an additional \$35.6 million allocation to offset the "obligation limitation," which imposes an automatic percentage deduction from available IRR and other Federal Highway Administration program funds.

The \$35.6 million is not provided under the Senate bill for FY 2003 due to a sharp decrease in federal gas tax receipts. Committee staff informs us that IRR will receive \$269 million under S. 2808, which restores a proposed \$8.6 billion cut to federal highway programs and distributes it according to TEA-21, including the standard obligation limitation. While this funding level is a disappointment, it does at least partially offset the effects of the obligation limitation on the IRR program.

The House Appropriations Committee will not consider its version of the FY 2003 Transportation Appropriations bill until September. Tribal governments are urged to contact members of the House Appropriations Committee to request that they support full funding at the authorized level for federal highways, including the IRR program.