

STATEMENT OF SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE
VICE CHAIRMAN
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE
APRIL 28, 1999 OVERSIGHT HEARING
ON THE
CAPACITY AND MISSION
OF THE
BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

Over three years ago, we began discussions with then assistant secretary for Indian affairs, Ada Deer, regarding the hearing the committee holds today.

We did so because we believed that it was time that the American public and the congress developed a better understanding of the bureau of Indian affairs.

For too many years, the bureau has been the one of the most under-rated and overly-criticized agencies in the federal government.

It is the agency that Indian country and appropriators love to hate.

In recent years, the administrative capabilities of the bureau of Indian affairs have been decimated by government-down-sizing, early retirement authority, and diminishing resources.

Nonetheless, we continue to charge the bureau with an ever-increasing and wider range of responsibilities — in furtherance of the united states trust responsibilities — while failing to provide the bureau with the resources any agency would need to carry out these duties.

Add to that the impact of self-determination contracting and self-governance compacting on the ranks and functions of the bureau — and it is a small wonder that this agency is perceived by its critics to be operating under siege and unable to meet the task.

Today, the bureau has some of the most highly-respected and imminently capable leadership — people who come from Indian country and know well the landscape of challenges that native people are facing in most all tribal communities.