

Head of Indian Affairs says he won't resign

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) - The head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs said last week he will not resign, despite a call from a Connecticut senator to do so. "I will not step down," said Dave Anderson.

Anderson was the keynote speaker at the United Tribes Technical College commencement ceremony in Bismarck. The founder of Famous Dave's restaurants took over Feb. 2 as the Interior Department's assistant secretary for Indian affairs.

Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., called for Anderson's resignation earlier this week, saying Anderson no longer is making critical decisions on tribal recognition.

A congressional committee has stepped up its efforts to investigate the effect of gambling on the federal tribal recognition process.

Anderson, who co-founded a company that runs tribal casinos, said he

has recused himself from tribal recognition and gambling-related decisions to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest. He said he also has stepped down as chairman of his Famous Dave's barbecue chain, which opened a restaurant in Bismarck last month.

Anderson was introduced at Friday's ceremony by Tex Hall, president of the National Congress of American Indians and chairman of the Three Affiliated Tribes in North Dakota. Hall said he had been contacted by officials in Connecticut to help out Anderson.

"I told them I would not, because he's a fellow American Indian," Hall said. "I told them it's their issue."

Hall urged graduates and others at the United Tribes' commencement to stand behind Anderson.

"(He) is an Indian man committed to Indian country," Hall said.

Anderson said he would make no apologies for promoting casinos in the

past. "Gaming opportunities for our Indian people have often helped tribal infrastructure and created meaningful jobs," he said. Anderson is a Choctaw and Chickasaw, and an enrolled member of the Lac Courte Oreilles Lake Superior Band of Ojibwa. Anderson co-founded Grand Casinos Inc. In another BIA news item last week:

Anderson asked Interior Secretary Gale Norton to delegate authority for all matters related to tribal gaming to BIA's deputy assistant secretary Aurene Martin. The order was signed last month and took effect immediately.

In an accompanying memo, Norton said Anderson, confirmed by the Senate last December, initiated the change.

"He didn't want to have any possibility that his past associations would call into question any of his decisions," said spokeswoman Tina Kreisher.

The move drew criticism from Con-

necticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, who protested that critical decisions will now be made by someone not subject to Senate confirmation.

"I am deeply troubled that Mr. Anderson will be unable to perform some of the key responsibilities of the office for which he was nominated and confirmed by Congress," said Blumenthal.

He added that recusal on individual cases is appropriate but, "such general, across the board delegation is severely problematic, raising constitutional and statutory questions about overbroad illegal delegation." While Anderson will have no influence in recognition decisions, gaming matters or issues related to tribes taking land into trust for casino purposes, Kreisher said that he will continue to have other duties as the head of BIA. He will oversee social welfare programs, other land use issues, and the 184 BIA schools located in 23 states.

Congressional panel vows BIA investigation

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) - A congressional committee said last week that it expects to subpoena leaders of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation as part of a widening investigation into the effects of big money gaming on the federal tribal recognition process.

Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis, R-Va., said the panel invited the Schaghticoke, who are based in Kent, Conn., to testify at a hearing Wednesday, but they declined.

During the hearing the inspector general for the Bureau of Indian Affairs said his office is also investigating the BIA's decision to grant the Schaghticoke federal recognition to determine if the agency followed proper procedures.

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