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# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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## SECRETARY MORTON ANNOUNCES UPGRADING OF INTERIOR'S ROLE IN SERVING U.S. TERRITORIES

Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton today announced an upgrading of the functions heretofore assigned to the Department's Office of Territories in order to move them closer to the policy and decision-making levels.

Henceforth, he announced, the functions will be managed by a new Deputy Assistant Secretary for Territories, operating directly under supervision of Harrison Loesch, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Public Land Management.

The Office of Territories, as an entity, thus will be restructured as a staff element headed by the new Deputy Assistant Secretary, as yet unnamed.

"An entirely new organizational approach is needed," Secretary Morton said, "for the Secretariat to involve itself more closely in the work that remains to be done in the territories -- in education, health, economic and environmental services, and in increased assistance toward self-government.

"There has been a great change in the scope and nature of Interior's responsibilities in recent years," Secretary Morton added. "Guam and the Virgin Islands now elect their own Governors as well as their own Legislatures. American Samoa has made giant strides toward defining its new role.

"The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands' political status is under serious discussion and negotiation. All this is in sharp contrast to 10 or 15 years ago, before Alaska and Hawaii became States and Puerto Rico became a Commonwealth."

The reorganization move, recommended by a special Federal inter-agency task force, will realistically diminish the custodial role of the old Office of Territories and substitute a more specialized assistance to the island peoples and their governments, in keeping with their changing needs, the Secretary said.

As a Member of Congress, Secretary Morton served on the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee and was active in developing legislation that helped the territories in various moves toward self-government and self-help.

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