

The Trump Administration announced two key appointments to Indian Affairs posts in the Department of the Interior this week

by Skip Durocher and Michael R. Mills

Tara Sweeney, an Iñupiaq citizen, has been nominated to serve as the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior. Ms. Sweeney's nomination is subject to confirmation by the Senate, which will likely take several months. Until she is confirmed by the Senate, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs John Tahsuda III will continue as the Acting Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs. The Assistant Secretary plays a critical role in the tribal-federal government-to-government relationship. She will assist the Secretary of the Interior in fulfilling the United States' trust responsibility to Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages. Before her appointment, Ms. Sweeney was the Executive Vice President of External Affairs for the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation. She has lived most of her life in rural Alaska. Based on her record serving Alaska Native interests, it appears that her appointment is good news for Indian country.

Bryan Rice, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, is the new Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). He started this week and will lead the BIA in its mission to work with tribal governments on law enforcement and justice; agricultural and economic development; tribal governance; and natural resources management programs. Before accepting this position, he held a variety of positions in Interior (including at BIA) and other federal agencies. He has extensive experience in timber and natural resources management, which might be an indicator of the Administration's priorities for Indian country.

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