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Statement from Director Kevin Gover on the Passing of Forrest J. Gerard (Blackfeet Tribe), 1925-2013



Senator Henry Jackson and Forrest Gerard, 1976

The National Museum of the American Indian joins Indian Country in mourning the death of one of the greatest Indian leaders in modern history. Forrest J. Gerard (Blackfeet Tribe) was a key architect of the self-determination policy that has defined Indian affairs for the last forty years. In 1977, he became the first person appointed to serve as Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior.

In 2010, Mark Trahan, veteran journalist and a former editor of the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* said in an interview, “We think of great Indian leaders from the 19th century—Chief Joseph, Washakie or Crazy Horse, for example—but people like those heroes live in our time, too. Forrest is such a person.” We agree.

Forrest Gerard was born January 15, 1925, in Browning, Montana. During World War II, he served with the U.S. Army Air Corps as a member of a bomber crew. After flying 35 combat missions over Nazi-

occupied Europe, he became the first member of his family to attend college, receiving a bachelor's degree from the University of Montana in 1949.

Over the next decades, he served in all the key places where federal Indian policy is made. His record of service to Indian Country and the United States is extraordinary. His vision of empowering Indian Nations was advanced hugely through his service.

Though we mourn the loss of this great man, we also celebrate his life and leadership. “Forrest was a friend and mentor to me and many others who have worked in the field of federal Indian policy,” said Kevin Gover, director of the National Museum of the American Indian. “He leaves a legacy of commitment and achievement that we should all aspire to. I am grateful to know him and his family. Their friendship is a gift I will always treasure.”

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