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# Montana senator stalls Webster's confirmation

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FBI Director William H. Webster probably never imagined that horse thieves and other criminal elements on Indian reservations would be an issue during Senate confirmation of his nomination to become head of the CIA.

But that's exactly what has happened.

Although approved unanimously by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on May 1, Mr. Webster, for the second time in as many weeks, has seen the final Senate confirmation vote put on hold.

Last week it was Sen. Ernest F. Hollings, South Carolina Democrat, who held up the vote — until he was assured by the bureau that it would aggressively investigate possible criminal negligence by Foreign Service officers in security violations at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

After that matter was settled, this week Sen. John Melcher, a Montana Democrat whose state is home to seven Indian tribes, announced he was putting a hold on the nomination.

Described by a colleague as "a man with all the blunt stubbornness of the Montana plains," Mr. Melcher, a member of the Senate Select Com-

mittee on Indian Affairs, has decided to put the Webster confirmation on hold because of what he called a "totally unsatisfactory" record by the FBI in its investigations of crimes committed on Indian reservations.

In an interview yesterday, the Montana senator said as far as he is concerned, the confirmation "will be kept on hold until something is done about the terrible situation."

By a majority vote, the Senate could override Mr. Melcher's hold, but "I'll get the attention of the FBI director long enough where he'll direct his people to do something," the senator said.

William M. Baker, the FBI's assistant director for congressional affairs, said yesterday that the bureau's agents "have solved many important crimes around the country committed on Indian reservations." He said the problems that do exist are partly due to the remoteness of the reservations.

"The response time is a consideration, especially when it involves the preservation of a crime scene. We will have an agent in one town and he'll get a call to go to another [town] and unless that crime scene is preserved it makes it difficult."

"But we're working closely with

tribal police and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to increase existing investigative capabilities by those important police forces," Mr. Baker said.

Mr. Melcher said yesterday that the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs has been pressuring the FBI to improve its record "for some time now. I hoped we could work it out peacefully," he said.

The senator also expressed concern about the impact an FBI reorganization plan in his state might have on the reservations. The plan, to be decided by the new soon-to-be appointed FBI director, would shift supervisory authority from the FBI field office in Butte, Mont., to Salt Lake City, Utah.

"Are we going to get anywhere by moving chain of command down to Salt Lake?" Mr. Melcher asked.

He cited statistics yesterday that show most serious crimes on reservations go unsolved.

On the nation's 20th largest reservation, the Blackfeet Reservation located adjacent to Montana's Glacier National Park, there were 99 instances of bodily assault between 1983 and 1985, including homicides. Of those 99 cases, three resulted in convictions.

Similar statistics were recorded for other reservations throughout the state during the same two-year period, including the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, where out of 39 cases only four convictions were reported.