

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JOHN C. WHITAKER, UNDER SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR, PRESS CONFERENCE REGARDING INDIAN AFFAIRS, WASHINGTON, D. C., MARCH 16, 1973

America's attention has been focused on the irresponsible violence at Wounded Knee. The future of Indian self-determination can only be set back when unrepresentative groups disregard the law.

Instead of leading to solutions and the conditions for a new era of Indian self-determination, violence leads only to more violence, and more suffering.

Human injustice cannot be eliminated without the conditions for equity -- and full moral responsibility cannot be met without full legal authority.

At the same time, however, we share the belief of America's elected Indian leaders that many Indian needs must be met with legislation, with funding, and assistance -- and not through negotiation at gunpoint.

The Administration has today retransmitted seven key Indian affairs bills to the Congress. Each of these bills was submitted to the 92nd Congress. All of them were originally set forth in the President's Message to the Congress on Indian Affairs on July 8, 1970.

In the two and a half years since then, however, no final Congressional action was taken. With today's proposed legislation America's Indians are for the first time in over a century on the threshold of "a new era in which the Indian future is determined by Indian acts and decision."

This is the goal the Federal Government is seeking to achieve. We need Congressional action.

The seven bills that we are again sending to the Congress can provide America's Indians with the full support they need to achieve new dignity and prosperity without the benign paternalism of the past.

They include bills that will:

-- Upgrade the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the level of Assistant Secretary. This is critical to insuring that human needs receive the same priority that is assigned to resource needs.

-- Create a Trust Counsel Authority to provide a totally independent source of legal counsel to assist tribes in protecting and preserving their resources, especially land, water and mineral rights.

- A Contracting Bill which, with its companion Civil Service Bill, will enable the tribes to assume much control of services now provided by the BIA. This is absolutely essential to providing the tribes as self-governing units the authorization to operate and manage Interior and HEW programs at the reservation level.

- An Indian Financing Act to provide needed capital for economic development on the reservations. This will boost revolving loan funds from \$25 to \$75 million and would enable up to \$200 million worth of private loans to be guaranteed.



-And an amendment to the Johnson-O'Malley Act to allow us to direct Johnson-O'Malley funds currently limited to the school districts to Indian tribes themselves

While the Federal Government has dramatically increased funding for Indian programs in the last four years we have exhausted the limits of existing authority to provide America's Indians the full opportunity to achieve self-determination. We need Congressional action -- not inconclusive hearings or an expression of sentiment at a press conference.



I believe most members of the Congress want to act -- but unless they act now, the Nation, and our people -- and the American Indian will be forced to live with the past.

Thank you.

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