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Speech of
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Third Annual State Indian Conference
Stewart Indian School, Stewart, Nevada
October 5, 1973

Mr. Chairman, Governor O'Callaghan, distinguished guests, ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honor to respond to your invitation to be here for the Third Annual State Indian Conference. I congratulate our hosts, the Nevada Indian Affairs Commission, for this event, and I congratulate Governor O'Callaghan for his sponsorship of this conference.

I am aware of the reputation of this Commission for your fine record of accomplishment in behalf of Indian progress in your state. In my opinion, much that you have done stands as a model for other states with substantial Indian populations.

I bring you the warmest greetings of my immediate superior, Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton, and assure you of his concern and dedication to our common task of serving the Indian communities of our nation, we in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and you in your State Commission.

As you leaders in Indian affairs in Nevada are aware, I was asked by the Secretary to come to Washington in February of this year to assist him with the BIA. It had suffered an unprecedented amount of disarray--the Commissioner had been dismissed, the top

echelon of management had resigned, the Washington office had fallen victim to a militant takeover with records stolen and destroyed. Field offices and Indian schools had come upon uneasy times and tribal governments had the eerie experience of being threatened. The general public, and to some extent, the federal government, was not only confused but demanded affirmative action. The incident at Wounded Knee had its roots take-over in the Fall of last year and bloomed into a confrontation at about the same time I arrived on the Washington scene.

I realize, as do you all, that there were many injustices heaped upon the Indian tribes and people in years gone by, as settlers of the dominant white race, eager for land and natural resources, steadily pushed westward and relentlessly crowded the original people out of the way. And some people, no friends of true Indian progress, would like to pretend nothing has changed. In my office I saw a film recently, produced by Encyclopedia Brittanica--supposedly a reputable firm--intended as "educational material" for school children all over America. This film harped back to the old days of Indian wars, the Trail of Tears, and the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. The clear intent of the film is to imply that such harsh and unjust treatment of the Indians is still the policy of the white race, backed by the government.

Nothing in the film gives credit to the constructive work of education, welfare, employment, housing, and countless other programs for assistance and helpfulness which you and your associates, and which my associates and I, are extending to our Indian fellow-citizens. Nothing was said or shown in the film about the attempts to correct injustices in the taking of Indian lands by restitution through the Indian Claims Commission.

This is the sort of thing being sponsored by those who desire to rule or ruin the BIA. I venture to say that some of them desire also to intrude upon the good work you in this State Commission are doing. They do not have the welfare of the Indians at heart, but only their own selfish interests.

In contrast, there are millions of people in this country of ours, of all races, who appreciate our efforts in behalf of this noble minority of original Americans. I feel that you and I and our associates need to inform them, and the public at large, more fully as to how essential our efforts are to Indian progress.

I appreciate the time you have given me on this program this evening, for it gives me the opportunity to discuss the theme: "The Bureau of Indian Affairs -- an Indian Resource."

It is certain that all of you here--all dedicated as you are to assisting in the continuing advancement of our Indian people, know very well the relationship of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to the reservation Indians, as well as the relationship of the BIA to such public-spirited organizations as your own in this state. However, let me consider with you several ways by which the BIA is actually and vitally a resource for the American Indians, in this period of considerable change and adjustment.

With this in mind, what can I say as to the Bureau of Indian Affairs being a true asset to the reservation Indians?

First: Traditionally, from the time it was established, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has stood staunchly as an abiding protection for the rights of Indian people. From the time when the Indians were a conquered people, on

through the years when they were closely confined to reservations under a paternalistic system of support by the "Great White Father", and on again to the modern day when they are full citizens of the United States, with all the political and civil rights enjoyed by citizens of all other ethnic origins, the BIA has carried the responsibility of protection and assistance to all Indians on lands held in trust by the federal government.

The BIA must never lose sight of the fact that its fundamental duty is to the reservation Indians. I realize, as you do, that there are would-be Indian leaders who are not a part of reservation life, who would like to cripple or even abolish the U. S. Bureau of Indian Affairs.

When such people are asked who would take over its duties, they answer: "We would." When pressed for a better answer, some of these militants declare that they would not only abolish the Bureau, but also do away with the duly elected chiefs and tribal councils. These are the same types of "urban Indians" who contend that all the old treaties must be revived and enforced exactly as originally written, such as the Sioux treaty of 1868, even though those treaties have been modified time and again by acts of Congress, generally for the benefit of the Indians themselves.

Other Indians of this type declare that an Act of Congress, passed in 1920, called the "Snyder Act," makes the BIA responsible for the protection, care, and welfare of all Indian people, regardless of whether they reside on trust lands. I feel that we who are engaged in the cause of Indian progress can never turn aside from helping Indian people wherever

they live and work, if we can do so compatible with our primary duty. But the federal government's fundamental responsibility has been, is now, and in the future must be, for the reservation Indians.

Second: The Bureau of Indian Affairs is the Indians' great resource in establishing the groundwork for their future progress and development. In this connection, at the outset of my work with the BIA I stated there were four things I deemed important to keep abreast of the needs of reservation Indians:

1. An amendment to the U. S. Constitution, or specific legislation by Congress, that lays to rest once and for all the matter of termination of federal services by the unilateral action of any branch of government.
2. A better opportunity for participation in the financial resources of our country. This can be done in three ways, an improved budget process; the use of revenue bond financing for physical improvements; and a national banking system for the Indian community.
3. A massive Indian Reservation Renewal Act that would provide \$250 million each year for ten years to bring not only needed improvements in the reservation properties, but simultaneously eliminate unemployment and within the ten year period develop a "gross national product" for each reservation area. Today the federal dollar merely passes through the reservation without the benefit of being "turned-over" to generate a local economy.
4. A complete study of all laws, rules, regulations, codes and manuals that affect the federal relationship to the American Indian.

In the third place: The Bureau of Indian Affairs is a definite resource for American Indians because it encourages tribes to participate in existing programs to insure their own tribal priorities. These include: Increased assistance to the Indian people for employment in their own communities; protection of their resources, with the highest priority given to land titles, boundaries, and water rights; better roads on their reservations; and increased tribal control of their education.

Each of these is a major item in the policy of the BIA, to move the Indian people rapidly toward self-government. And, I am glad to say, each is succeeding in its purpose. All of these goals are in direct support of the policy announced by President Nixon in a message to Congress in July 1970 -- a policy of greater "self-determination", which I prefer to call "self-government" at the tribal level.

Through the cooperation of the BIA, Congress, and many other agencies of our government, progress is being made in protecting the rights of Indian tribes and individuals and in providing increasing opportunities for advancement on the reservations. I cite these examples:

An American Indian National Bank, owned by the Indian community, has been formed and will become operative this Fall. It is headquartered in Washington, with full access to the financial circles of the community.

The Justice Department has activated a civil rights division for the exclusive protection of the American Indian in his constitutional and tribal privileges.

A bill has been introduced into the Senate to establish a commission to study and recommend revision of the laws governing the relationship of the federal government to the Indian.

Tribal governments are now more active in exercising the prerogative of a sovereignty and revising their constitutions to become responsive to the needs of their constituents.

Indian schools are now supervised by school boards with Indian parents serving as members to assure responsive education for the Indian youth. Some schools are being contracted to Indian organization for total operation of the educational system.

An industrial program for the reservations is going steadily forward. Since its beginning in 1957, the program has enlisted the cooperation of about 250 business firms, which have come out to the Indian areas with new or branch plants to employ Indian workers. In addition, scores of industries have been set up, entirely owned and operated by Indians, adding still greater opportunities for steady payroll jobs.

This program has had the cooperation of State Indian Commissions, such as yours here in Nevada, wherever there are substantial Indian populations. In this field I speak with experience, for as many of you know, in 1965 I was made director of "cooperative projects" for the company of which I was an employee in Oklahoma. In this task I worked with government and industry to create jobs for disadvantaged people, particularly Indians. I helped to establish some 75 separate Indian-owned-and-operated companies in several states. It was an experience that convinced me that Indians, given proper training, can hold their own in the modern American economy. I hope and expect that in the future we may have even greater cooperation between the BIA and the State Indian Commissions.

Having been the head of an Indian tribe for many years and knowing first hand the frustrations of the American Indian, it is not difficult for me to have a feeling of compassion and understanding for all factions -- the Indians, government and the general public. Although many inequities have befallen the American Indian, all tribes, individuals and organizations seek the same things--equality, opportunity and justice. None can afford the luxury of division of thought or purpose.

It is my hope and purpose that we may all work together, whether in state or federal government, to present a unified front for true progress for our Indian citizens, for individuals and families, for tribes and their communities. Needless to say, we still have a long way to go, but the probability for success looks brighter every day. I wish for you, my fellow associates in a noble cause, every success in your programs and activities, and I hope to be in a position to help in any way I can.

May I conclude by quoting, with my hearty agreement, the words of Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton:

"My great hope for the Indian is for the feelings he has about himself. My prayer is that soon he will sit at his table and in truth be thankful for the bounties of this land--his land--our land. I want his heart to swell with pride that he is an American, and that for him there is an American dream. He must be comfortable in his heritage and proud of his ancestry. I pray that he will feel himself a part of the spirit and strength of America."

In that sentiment, I know you will join with me.