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EXCERPTS FROM REMARKS BY ROBERT L. BENNETT, COMMISSIONER OF INDIAN AFFAIRS, BEFORE THE INDIAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION IN PHILADELPHIA, PA., APRIL 26, 1966 (PARISH HOUSE, FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH, 2125 CHESTNUT STREET)

The war on poverty, and our strivings toward a Great Society, have brought the American Indian people into the forefront of the national conscience. There are organizations, such as the Indian Rights Association, which have for years plugged away in behalf of reservation Indians, but the voices have been like whispers under the din of other issues. The voice of the Indian people themselves has not yet been raised in one chorus, although there are signs that this is happening now.

We are therefore at a crossroads in Federal-Indian relations, and I sense that it may be the last cross-road wherein the choices remain wide and good. Let us, therefore, pool our best judgments in order to arrive at the destination all of us seek: A place in contemporary American history in which the Indian people may take as full a part in the affairs of this country as do other American citizens.

A conference on Indian affairs was called by Secretary Udall two weeks ago. Although the locale was Santa Fe, New Mexico, the conference was national in scope. At that time he called for "foundation legislation" -- either in the form of an omnibus measure or a series of measures -- designed to pave the way for solving the hitherto seemingly insoluble questions arising from the trusteeship status of Indian lands.

The Secretary said: "We cannot make policy and implement it on our own, particularly policy requiring appropriations or new laws. The Congress is our partner.....As far as the Indian people themselves are concerned, I think they have been too content at times to make the Bureau a scapegoat. There has been too much timidity.....I think that our Indian people must realize that the way to progress in this country is usually that of boldness and taking of risks, not of timidity.....Several States and local governments are also responsible.....The attitude.....is-'the Indian people are not our problem; let the Federal Government take care of them.'

".....New waves have washed ashore in the last five years. Our country has moved into an unprecedented period of peacetime prosperity.....The Indian people should be tied into the great things that have been happening....."

The first thing I intend to do is meet with Indian people -- many of them -- in various parts of the country. We need to have a conference between the Federal administrators of Indian policy and the Indian people who are directly affected by policy decisions. Out of them I expect to come back with more concrete ideas as to how we can deal with the underlying issues.

The subcommittee on Indian affairs of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs earlier this month issued a report which requires a response from us within 90 days. The report raises certain questions, among which are these:

(1) "What is the Federal policy with respect to termination of Federal trusteeship responsibility for Indian lands?"

On this point, I should say that the policy remains the same as it has consistently been over the past five years. But the gray area of what constitutes the proper approach is one which the Indian people themselves will have to help us define.

(2) The second issue raised by the Senate also involves trusteeship responsibilities, and deals with the multiplying heirship problem. Indian trust lands that are individually rather than tribally owned have, over the years, become fractionated into many non-economic holdings as the result of inheritances. The Bureau of Indian Affairs is bookkeeper. The bookkeeping is highly costly.

The difficulty in solving the heirship problem seems to be in arriving at a consensus. Everyone has a different idea as to how it should be done. Maybe we should think of alternative ways to settle the problem, giving the option to the Indian people.

(3) A third point demanding attention is the status of Federal education programs for Indian people. What are the routes we might best travel to accelerate public school opportunity for <u>all</u> Indian children?

At present, our Federal schools enroll about 50,000 -- or one-third -- of the reservation Indian children. The remainder are in public schools, or, in a few instances, parochial or other schools. Our major school construction programs during the past five years have been in areas which are remote from public schools; and we have been concentrating upon elementary school construction. Is it advisable to attempt more of the 'peripheral dormitory' approach -- i.e. establishing dormitories adjacent to public schools so that Indian children from remote areas may attend public schools? This is being done in some cases with respect to teen-agers. But what about the little ones?

An overriding question also still remains: How capable would a public school district be to take on, in sudden influx, a whole classroom full of Indian children? Aside from the physical limitations, there are the other considerations: How skilled are the public school teachers and counselors in

providing programs for the non-English-speaking, culturally different children who come from remote areas?

A way through this morass of problems must be found. We Federal administrators cannot find it alone. Satisfactory solutions may be found only with the fullest cooperation among all levels of government, in concert with the Indian people themselves.

(4) Another question raised by the Senate subcommittee was that of industrial-business development of Indian reservation lands versus an all-out effort to encourage migration outward into the centers of job opportunity.

The ultimate answers must be the result of voluntary decisions by the Indian people. By an enlightened program of vocational training and job placement aid -- which we have -- it has been possible during the past decade to help about 50,000 Indian people settle successfully in off-reservation communities. There are som Indian areas that offer very little promise in the way of massive commercialization. These are the areas that are removed geographically from the business and industrial centers. Development for tourist recreational purposes remains a good hope, but not necessarily the whole answer. On the other hand, there are some reservation areas that hold tremendous potential for varied economic development. But, no matter what approaches may seem best as the result of feasibility studies -- and those we have financed in 80 or more instances -- there must be a comprehension on the part of the Indian people as to the nature of the national economy and the means they must take to benefit from our continuing economic growth.

These fundamental questions -- and other questions that arise out of them must become the focus of our attention.

The national conscience has been stirred by the plight of reservation Indians. We no longer need to "sell" Indians to the people of this country. What we need now is to draw the Indian people to the conference tables, together with the best minds in education and finance and community development and government administration. The paternalistic approach is good no longer. It has resulted, in its worst manifestations, in a culture of poverty, and even at best it encourages a dependency approach to life.

This is not the way to fulfillment of the American dream. And surely the American dream of the good life, the active life, the life of self-determination, should be the fire to rekindle in the hearts of the first Americans.

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