



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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To THE AMERICAN PEOPLE:

There has been and is being much written about the American Indians. Much of the editorializing is out of focus. The reader is often left with the impression that the Federal Government is some kind of a monster on the war path trying to destroy the American natives. Nothing could be farther from the truth. I am not trying to defend the past. I am the first to admit that the formulae of the past fell short of the mark and resulted in a relative holding action in the struggle for existence faced by the Indian tribes.

President Nixon recognized this early on in his first administration and on July 8, 1970 his message to the Congress on Indians articulated a new direction and a new set of policies. The major thrust of his message was toward complete self-determination as opposed to the historic doctrine of termination. Self-determination means Indian direction and management of Indian affairs. It means that the tribes themselves call the tone. But it does not mean that any tribe will be left floundering without leadership, direction or its fair share of the allocated resources. It does not mean that accountability for the use of Federal funds is foregone or forgiven. It does mean that the Indians, if and when they desire, can grow out of being a ward of the State into involvement and full participation.

The President called on the Congress to provide authority for tribal takeover of federal programs to the funded by the government through contracts with the tribes. He proposed new levels and more money for education, health services, and economic development. He proposed the return of Blue Lake. In spite of the fact that most of the legislation the President asked for remained unconsidered by the Congress much of the President's program has been implemented within existing authority.

Here are some facts that I think every American ought to have at hand before charging into the judgment seat to pass on the pros and cons of the country's relationship with and responsibility to its indigenous people.

The programs and services of the Bureau of Indian Affairs of Interior are by law directed only to federally recognized tribes. These are tribes and, groups for which the government has a specific trust responsibility, the origin of which is a treaty or agreement.

Most of the federally recognized tribal people live on reservations, allotted lands or in the native villages of Alaska. It is estimated that there might be as many as 400,000 people having 25% or more Indian blood who live in the cities or away from the influence of the tribe. There are a few tribes that are not federally recognized; some of these are recognized and serviced by the states in which they are located. A few have terminated their relationship with the government. To say the least, the total Indian Community is heterogeneous. They are located all over the country. However, all of the tribes of over 6,000 people are west of the Mississippi River.

Indians or native people who are not part of the federally recognized or state serviced systems are all free, red citizens of the United States, as are all Indians, and eligible for all programs available to

everyone else in the same socio-economic status. This Indian to government relationship is under debate. The question is should an Indian outside the federally recognized system be treated or serviced by government differently or separately from individuals of other racial origins. This is a matter of national policy and should be dealt with by the Congress.

There are 478 federally recognized tribes or groups totaling 488,000 native people. The largest is the Navajo with a population of over 125,000. Some groups consist of only a few families. The great bulk of the total falls within the 25 largest tribes and the Alaska natives.

The tribes to a degree govern themselves through a democratic system. They elect a Chairman or Chief and a Tribal Council. The Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs recognizes the elected tribal government. It is the policy of the Department to work with the tribal governments to prevent duplication of effort-to maximize the benefits of available programs to the members themselves.

The Department of the Interior through the BIA carries out only part of the total federal effort for Indians. For example, the 1974 budget provides total federal funding for Indian programs of over \$1,200,000,000 of which the BIA portion is approximately \$550,000,000. This represents a massive increase of dollar effort during the Nixon years. The BIA, for example, was funded at the \$250,000,000 level when the President came to office in 1969.

Another fact is that the BIA is an Indian oriented organization. The Bureau hires and promotes on an Indian preference basis. During the last four years two thirds of the top officials in the BIA were Indian including the Commissioner.

One-third of all the BIA employees who are so often criticized because of their numbers (17,000) are teachers in Indian schools. The BIA higher education scholarship program of 20 million dollars per year virtually guarantees an Indian boy or girl a college education if they will qualify themselves and work at it. The spectrum of vocational training has been broadened with new opportunities at all levels.

The approved budget request for fiscal 1974 by Interior for Indian training and manpower development is \$35.3 million. The total vocational and manpower training money will be about \$64% million. If vocational training were funded at the same rate for the total American population the annual cost would be over \$26 billion.

Economic Development this is a slow and arduous task. The investment of capital is only a small part of it. Great magazines, for example, are not just printing presses and pulp forests. They are an organized group of dedicated, skilled people. The same is true for a successful Indian enterprise, but it doesn't come about overnight.

There has been progress. We are moving ahead with more industrial jobs available every year and more new successful Indian enterprises in being. The critic jumps on the Indian unemployment figure. It is high, very high, about three times the national average. Part of this is because he is not where the work is-part of it is because he does not have the skill required-part of it is his own lack of motivation. The road of least resistance is all too often not to work or go out and seek a job. But in spite of the odds imposed by these circumstances, more money, government and private, is being invested, more jobs are available and more Indians are working for pay. In the last few years, 8,000 jobs have been opened up to Indians through BIA efforts. There are 475 new Indian owned enterprises in being. Some will fail, but most will succeed.

It is difficult to generalize when describing the characteristics of the Indian Community. There is great variance in point of view and attitude among individuals and wide differences in the styles and approach to life from tribe to tribe.

On the fringe of all of this there has grown up in the wake of the black militant movement in this country a revolutionary Indian element. Dramatic violence is their pattern. The occupation of Alcatraz, Nike sites, the federal office building in Washington, the village of Wounded Knee and others all fall into it. Their effort is symbolic rather than substantive. They believe that the pursuit of their cause transcends their criminal methods. Their demands are vague and change from day to day. They do not represent a constituted group with whom the government can contract or can serve.

Some of their leaders are star struck with self-righteousness, some are renegades, some are youthful adventurers, and some have criminal records. They come forth with great gusto when there is hell to raise, otherwise, they are loosely organized slipping from one expensive to the taxpayer's event to the next under a cloak of false idealism. The bloody past is the color of their banner, publicity is the course of their future.

There is no way to relive the past. History is full of atrocities. You don't break the poverty cycle by reliving the Sioux massacre at Wounded Knee. And you gain little revenge by glorifying the fall of Custer. With former Commissioner Bruce, I have maintained a wide open policy of communication with all Indian groups, federally recognized or not. I will continue to do so. The militants know that.

It is not a problem for them to sit down with me, the Department, or Members of the Congress or officials in other agencies of the government and discuss ways and means to improve the Indian to society or Indian to government relationships. All of the so called "rights" problems which the militants dramatize fall into one of these categories.

The Courts and the Claims Commission are loaded with "rights" cases and I am sure will be for some years to come. Some of these are very difficult. In many cases it's hard to find where the equity really is. Nobody argues that we should discontinue a vigorous pursuit of justice and settlement in the whole spectrum of water rights, boundaries, mineral rights, discrimination, and all the rest. I wish we could speed it up. The President's Trust Council proposal which the 92nd Congress ignored would help if it became law. This proposal provides for the Indians a separate legal counsel eliminating the inherent conflict of interest which now exists in the government's efforts to seek remedies and, to determine Indian rights.

There is one thing of which I am very sure. Nothing is gained by blackmail. You cannot run this government or find equitable solutions with a gun at your head or the head of a hostage. Any agency of government that is forced into a fast deal by revolutionary tactics, blackmail or terrorism is not worth its salt. These are criminal operations and should be dealt with accordingly.

There is no way that I or any other Secretary can undo the events of the past. If it was wrong for the European to move on to this continent and settle it by pioneerism and combat, it was wrong. But it happened and here we are. The treaties with the Indian tribes which seemed right during the conquest of the west are today the subject of much criticism.

What I have tried to do is look at the whole problem in the light of realism. Nothing will be gained by promoting a national guilt complex. What I am doing and intend to continue to do is to pursue some fundamental and achievable goals in the area of my responsibility for Indian affairs.

The first and foremost objective is to provide a ladder of federal programs and opportunities on which the Indian can climb out of the bottom of the social barrel. The breakdown of this falls in the categories of education, health services, vocational and manpower training and economic development and public-works. I am grateful to the President for his leadership in this effort. I also am confident that this Congress will be forthcoming with the perfecting legislation and appropriations for this.

Secondly, I suggest economic assistance of several kinds and the provision of skilled manpower to strengthen the tribal governments so, if they desire, they can take over all their affairs and direct government financed programs within their own communities. This will take time and for the very small groups may not be desirable. We must recognize that the success of a tribe as an entity is not measured by the quality of the federal agency on the reservations but by the capability and sense of responsibility of the elected tribal Chairmen and Council. If working with the tribes, we can do a good job in perfecting the capabilities of tribal governments, the BIA should, over the years, work itself out of business.

Thirdly, I feel strongly that we have been too slow in the development of essential public works and water systems on Indian reservations. Roads are essential. We are about 100 million dollars short of bringing the Indians' road system up to the national standard. Indian water and irrigation systems should be moved to completion. Competition for these dollars is rough, but I am fighting for them.

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 there is an American dream. He must be comfortable in his heritage and proud of his ancestry. He must be shameless in the spiritual pursuit of his God. He must feel free to cherish and husband what he fancies from his ancient culture; as he must feel akin to the arts and works of his time and of his contemporaries. I pray that he will feel himself part of the spirit and strength of America, not a burden to America.

It seems to me this is a prayer that can be answered not only by the actions of a committed government and people, but more by the Indian himself climbing steadily rung by rung from a base of opportunity unmatched any group in the society/ the world.

Facts and Figures

1. Federally recognized tribes and groups: 481
2. Population of Indians on or adjacent to reservations who are serviced by BIA: 488,000
3. Fiscal '73 funding for training and manpower development of Indians:
 - a) BIA: \$42,427,000 (Fiscal '74 request: \$35, 307,000)
 - b) Other Federal agencies: \$21,929,000 Total: \$64,356,000
4. Indian scholarship fund
 - a) Fiscal '73: \$20,956,000 (fiscal '74 ... request: \$19,938,000)
 - b) 13,500 students are benefiting from these scholarships
5. Approximately 8,000 jobs for Indians have been opened up through the efforts of BIA to place Indians

in permanent positions in business and industry 7. 1969 BIA budget: \$249.2 million

8. There are 17 tribes and groups with a total population of 2,498 which are not recognized by the Federal Government, but are recognized and serviced by State governments.

9. There are 52 tribal entities which are not recognized by the Federal or State Governments with a total population of 63,866 (all over the country but 38,700 are in North Carolina)

10. Under the President's revenue sharing plan \$6.2 million are going to Indian tribes or groups (this includes those recognized by the Federal Government and 10 which are recognized by State Governments - the revenue sharing plan allocates money on a county . basis i.e. if of a

Indian 8% population Indian land, the Indians will receive 8% of tile funds from that county.)enterprises have been established over the past few years.

<https://www.bia.gov/as-ia/opa/online-press-release/secretary-interior-morton-reports-indian-matters>