Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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"Self-Determination or disguised termination: let's be certain," This theme you have chosen for your 1972 convention is indeed an interesting one. Your choice reflects the uncertainty and skepticism that have disturbed people throughout history when changes have been proposed to alter the status quo.

It is only human that we should be reluctant to accept without question every new idea that comes our way. For as Indian people, our caution to discard the familiar and accept the new is particularly understandable when we look at our own past Federal-Indian history.

It is very easy for one to criticize the system to question the motives behind every new policy and program to pin labels on people with whom we disagree and to discount their ability to get something done. It is difficult, however, to work within the system to affect the kinds of changes we all want and need and to solve the problems we face together as Native Americans.

It is your right and duty to question any new policies that influence your lives and your futures. Words alone will not convince you that the real motives behind the self-determination policy are just simply that of assisting and enabling Indian people to control programs and policies and to shape their own destinies.

What I want to do today is to show that the administration has dedicated itself to self-determination without termination and that actions taken in the last few years prove our intent. In this case, demonstrated actions do indeed speak louder than words.

As evidence of our intent, let me cite several accomplishments of the last few years. BIA funding has more than doubled from $249 million about $521 million in just four years. Funding for education programs has doubled from $148 million to $301 million during this same time. And, the BIA road budget is more than four times what it was in 1969. Many of you know of the federal budget process and know that the increases we have gained have been no easy task. Often times, your support or lack of it has made me the difference.

Today 2/3 of the top executive positions in the Bureau's Washington Office are held by Native Americans. The number of Indian serving as BIA area directors has risen since 1969 from 1 of 11 to 7 out of 12 in 1972.

In late June, Secretary Morton announced approval of our recommendations to extend the policy of Indian preference to filling all vacancies in the Bureau, weather by original appointment, reinstatement or promotion. Through this means we hope that more Indians will fill administrative and managerial positions in order facilitate and enhance the concept of self-determination.

We are also stepping up efforts to recruit Indian women into key positions. A quick look at our top level personnel shows few women. I believe we can and should improve this record.

A major step toward Indian self-determination has been the assumption of Federally-Funded and administered programs by the tribes or other Indian communities. In accord with the president's special

message on India Affairs, The Bureau is encouraging and assisting tribes in the assumption of BIA program operations with the right of retrocession.

The Zuni Tribe of New Mexico accepted the responsibility for directing BIA activities at the Pueblo in May 1970. Almost a year later, the BIA signed a contract with the Miccosukee tribe of Florida enabling them to administer BIA programs on the reservation.

There have been other examples of this policy in action, the most recent is the proposal for an eventful assumption of BIA responsibilities by the Navajo tribe. Members of my staff have been at Navajo for the last few months working with the tribe to prepare a study for a phased turnover of programs to the tribe. BIA staff will be involved at all levels working with the tribe so that tribal needs will be properly anticipated in the undertaking of this momentous task.

The moves at Zuni, Miccosukee, Navajo and elsewhere are the beginning of a true self-determination for the Indian people.

I know that many of you are waiting to see how the tribes who have assumed control of BIA responsibilities fare under the federal-tribal relationship. I want to state now, once and for all, that this policy is not a termination plan in disguise. The Federal government will not automate or ignore its trust responsibilities. We in the Bureau cannot and do not intend to force this policy on the tribal councils. We want you to decide whether you want to run your own programs and if so how much responsibility you are willing to assume. I can assure you that, should you decide to assume control of your programs, funding will not be ended. And if you wish the bureau to reassume responsibility for the programs, we will do so. We strongly believe that this policy provides the best way in which tribes can move effectively and quickly toward self-determination without of fear of termination.

Since 1969, we have almost doubled the number of Indian contracts and increased the dollar amount from $8.8 million to over $58 million for 1973. There is no question that with the added thrust of using contracting as a means of having Indians become more involved in the activities of their reservation that the number of contracts and the monetary amounts will be greatly increased in the next several years.

Many Indian tribes do not have money to carry on their most basic governmental functions. In response to many tribal requests, two BIA programs have now been formed to help Indian tribes develop a more meaningful system of self-government. The tribal affairs management program was initially funded in 1972 and 25 tribal groups shared in the $228,000 appropriated. During the five month period of this pilot program, the participating tribes developed administrative plans of operation, updated tribal membership rolls and formulated new or revised election procedures, among other projects. In 1973, 23 tribal groups will have $422,000 for similar programs throughout the year.

A second program, tribal government development program, has been funded for the first time this year with $900,000. This program is aimed at helping tribes with little or no financial resources to permit them to develop self-governing skills. We hope to provide money for a large member of needy tribes to develop their own tribal government, efficiently and adequately. Announcements have been sent to all the tribes inviting them to participate in this program. We anticipate that from 40 to 50 tribes will take part and that by December this money will be in the hands of the participating tribes.

The five point program we announced in January has progressed with great success. I would like now to address myself to each of these points and to tell you just what has been happening since our

announcement.

Our first point and number one priority in 1972 was a reservation by reservation development program. The reservation acceleration program, better known as RAP, was introduced as a plan whereby tribes would influence changes in existing local BIA budgets to insure that BIA programs support tribal priorities.

Today, RAP has moved from a pilot status involving 11 selected tribes to a program of 37 participating tribes. Many of these tribes are at some state of negotiation. They are reviewing BIA budgets, programs and staffing at the agency, area office and central office levels. At this time, 15 tribes have submitted RAP documents to the central office for the third phase of the RAP process.

Salt River was the first tribe to negotiate with the central office. Through its RAP negotiations, Salt River was able to mobilize substantial BIA support for its plans for development and increased local control. The Bureau's office of Education programs in Washington,, D.C. will be providing direct assistance to the tribe in developing plans for an education system envisioned in the community's long-range development plans.

To assist with development on the reservation, we redirected our employment assistance program to train tribal manpower on the reservations, in Indian communities Oklahoma, or as close to home as participants may like.

One major means of employment assistance supporting the goals of local tribal development is by placing funds at the origin or local agency. This means that the control of dollars and the obligation and disbursement of employment assistance funds is at your reservation agency office, not in Washington nor in the area office. In this way, we fir programs around people, not people around programs and thus reinforce self-determination for Indian citizens.

Another new direction in employment assistance is the GI approach which grants funds to individuals at the point of origin and allows individual choices in institutional training. In fact, it offers literally the training resources of the whole country to clients of our programs.

Today we are facing the first open challenge to the question at the heart of the new directions toward self-determination. In order to give maximum dollar assistance locally, it has become necessary to realign our priorities in the employment assistance program. The closure of the Roswell employment training center represents a logical and predictable development in our total thrust toward the new directions announced for the employment assistance program in January. The issue at hand concerns Indian control over budgetary priorities vs. bureau-directed control, represented by non-Indian commercial interests. This issue transcends lesser questions about program services, costs and the like.

Money taken "off the top" to fund large natural contracts such RETC reduces not only funds available locally, it means the bureau has had to regress to its former pattern of controlling Indian by placing funds directly at destination services. The release of funds which would otherwise be committed to this project becomes available at agency levels, where increased local allotments enhance the possibility of funding a greater range of service options.

I know there is special concern regarding the Indian Police Academy at Roswell. I want to assure you that the police academy will be continued, but in another location closer to the home reservations of a majority of clientele. Further, I want to reassure all concerned that our decision to end services at

Roswell will not adversely affect clients presently enrolled at the center. While we are accepting no new applicants, we will keep the full range of services available, and all participants can complete their programs as originally planned.

Number three in our five point plan concerns the water resources of Indians on the reservations. Secretary Morton and I established the office of Indian water rights to protect the water rights of reservation Indians. Since its inception on January 10, 1972. The water rights office has made allocations for studies on 16 reservations, seven suits have already been filed in the courts and several are in preparation. The most significant in terms of interest throughout Indian country is the case which is pending on behalf of the pyramid lake Paiute tribe in the supreme court of the United States.

Until fiscal year 1972, the road construction program on Indian lands was funded at about $20 million per year. In 1972, road construction was increased by $10 million. This year, the funding level has been increased to $54 million which will provide for construction of approximately 700 miles of road surfacing.

The final point in our plans for 1972 called for increased Indian control of Indian education, our efforts in this direction have been implemented in a number of ways. Let’s take a close look into some of these areas.

At the present time, 13 schools are being operated by tribal groups under contract with the bureau, funding for these schools is approximately $4.5 million.

Funding for higher education assistance has jumped from $3.1 million in 1969 to $18.4 million in 1973. This year we are helping more than 11,000 Indian students further their education in college or universities throughout the country. Despite this significant increase, the Indian enrollment in colleges is increasing rapidly and many more dollars are needed.

More than $2.3 million in contracts for the administration of the BIA higher education assistance program have been entered into with tribal groups including the all Indian pueblo council, the Omaha tribe, the Tlingit-Haida council and the Navajo Tribal council.

The administration of $4 million of JOM funds in the states of North Dakota, Nebraska and New Mexico has been contracted to tribal groups.

Today, all federal operated schools have Indian advisory school boards. Special training programs for school board members, coupled with increased experience in school board operations, has greatly increased the effectiveness and influence of these boards. This experience also lays the groundwork for the further step of contracting for school operations.

In other areas we progressed toward our goal of self-determination. For the past two years we have been involved in promoting and assisting in the creation of an American Indian national Bank. This is a much needed institution for, as we all know, accessibility of financial services and especially the amount of credit available to Indians in the private sector has been severely limited. The American Indian bank will be a full-service bank, qualified to deal with problems unique to Indians, but operating by standard procedures observed by a sound financial institution.

As many of you already aware, the bureau has been conducting a joint investigation with the federal trade commission into the practices of traders on the Navajo Reservation. The investigation supports

several conclusions. First, there are significantly higher prices on the reservation than off and they cannot be accounted for by increased shipping costs. Secondly, there have been violations in the areas of truth in lending and pawn. Third, the federal regulations were found to be deficient in a few areas. Fourth, enforcement of the existing regulations has been poorly accomplished.

The bureau is now taking the measures to correct the situation, we are working with the tribe to develop viable economic alternatives which will permit lower prices for the Navajo consumers. Violations of Statutory provisions will be actively corrected by strict enforcement of the regulations. An enforcing agent is now on the reservation who reports directly to my office. New regulations are being drafted and will be issued in both English and Navajo.

The investigation at Navajo does not end there. This is only the beginning. What we have learned and the corrections that are now being made will be applied to similar situations throughout Indian country. We will do our best to make sure Indian consumers are totally protected wherever they may be.

The achievements gained during the past three years have not been easy, several of the decisions I have had to make as commissioner of Indian affairs have not been popular with some. However, these decisions have been made with extended deliberations and consultation with members of my staff, BIA area directors, and most important, with tribal leaders who people are most affected by these decisions. It’s been one of the trademarks of my tenure as commissioner to consult directly with tribal leaders and I promise you that this will continue.

As Native Americans we must all remember that now is the time for us to work together toward a better way of life for all Indian people. Now is the time for each of us to begin that crucial, self-revelatory process of knowing ourselves and understanding and trusting one another. We must prove that we can handle with dignity the new opportunities and the new responsibilities that are ours.

Cooperation may well be the one ingredient we are neglecting, your organization NCAI can go a long way in helping to bring about this cooperation. You must use your stature and influence as the largest and oldest national Indian organizations to exert renewed leadership and to call for cooperation throughout the Indian world.

I believe you can. I believe you will.