Media Contact: Office of the Secretary
For Immediate Release: January 26, 1970
Print PDF

It is a pleasure to participate with you today for I truly believe that this session is the Forerunner of the truly unified, coordinated effort in providing the services that the American Indians not only wants but is entitled to have.

Early in my job as a Secretary of the Interior I promised to consult with our first citizens to discover not only what was wanted but how we should go about filling those wants.

I believe that this is something interior and N.C.I.O. and all Indian related agencies must do.

At Albuquerque, at the National Congress of American Indians I met with many Indian leaders and delegates.

The one consistent theme of all our talks was that the American Indian wants to BIA to be more responsive and more effective.

To respond to the desire, I have signed an executive realignment which will greatly facilitate the flow of information from local areas to Washington.

This realignment will also give you strength and impetus to the important educational policies and practices so basic to social and economic development.

But more was said at Albuquerque not only do the people I have met with wanted change in the BIA they also want to participate in that change.

That is only right.

So far we have named individuals in acting capacities only and I have no commitments to fill any of the positions.

None have been filled, and now I need to know who the Indian Community wants in these jobs in the BIA.

The result of Indian demands for change within the BIA have been met with change. Now the American Indian must help me meet our other need to supply me with names.
This will always be how we will work together for we in interior or seeking to make Indian involvement paramount as a matter of policy and practice not merely as a matter of rhetoric.

You will see this emphasis right down to the local level, whether for Education, control of local school boards … greater relevance of curriculum …. For Effective methods of teaching.

Or for economic growth, which must be planned on a reservation by reservation basis bring new jobs and ownership to the reservation.

Or for increasing control of many activities such as utilities and Roads operation and maintenance which historically were carried out by the BIA.

This local input and control is basic to the Indian right the American birthright to determine one's own lifestyle.

This is not inconsistent with the special relationship that Indian people have and must continue to have with the federal government, and especially with the Department of the interior.

In that regard, neither President Nixon are I believe in a policy of termination.

But I'm equally strong in the belief that each and every American Indian wants far more than just that relationship.

Increased local Indian control, and a stronger, more effective voice within the bureau is the best way for this country to move ahead, with and for its Indian people.

Together, the Indian members and the department of government represented on this council can do much to Aid the American Indian as citizens of this country to move ahead.
