



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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This conference is auspicious for more reasons than one. It has brought together the key field personnel of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and officials of several other Federal agencies that are involved in President Johnson's War on Poverty.

We have had the good fortune to have with us the Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall, Assistant Secretaries John A. Carver, Jr., and John M. Kelly, Public Housing Commissioner Marie c. McGuire, Area Redevelopment Administrator William L. Batt, Jr., Dr. E. S. Rabeau, Deputy Chief, Indian Health Division of the Public Health Service, and Don Carmichael of the President's Task Force on the War on Poverty.

This roster of names and titles is indicative of the tempo of the times and the tone of this conference. This is the second gathering of the Bureau and field staffs since 1961 and that meeting, in Denver, was the first since 1938. It set perhaps a new precedent in Federal-Indian affairs.

In the past three years many changes have been made in the administration of Indian affairs. The changes reflect new approaches to help the Indian people obtain the education and economic self-sufficiency that will give them full status as participating citizens of this country.

The changes are marked in particular in the area of vocational training, industrial development of reservations, and improved community services. Shifting emphasis is apparent in policy and in personnel throughout the Bureau of Indian Affairs. More than one-half of all the reservation superintendents and nearly all area directors have new assignments.

We have had more than two years to work at the economic development program and now the time has come to examine the record for that period. Now the time has come to regroup our forces on our own war on poverty as we become part of the major War on Poverty declared by this Administration. The Institute of American Indian Art in Santa Fe is an appropriate locale for our conference because this school has moved ahead swiftly in the past two years. Opened in 1962, it has achieved a reputation among its students and prospective students--and among the general public--as a good basic high school and as an excellent vocational institute for the fine and applied arts.

Its art program attracted the attention of Mrs. Stewart Udall, and it was largely through her enthusiasm and efforts that an exhibit of American Indian student art is now being shown in the Department of the Interior in Washington. Public interest in Indian Affairs has been stimulated by this exhibit which nearly 2,000 people have already visited.

I hope that all the superintendents here this week will visit the classes and students and workshops at this Institute. You are the people who initially selected the students as candidates. It is important that you witness its impact on its students who are learning a new appreciation of Indian culture while they are being trained realistically for the world of work.

Education and vocational training are the underpinnings of all the Bureau's present policies, but in

order to achieve our still unmet needs in education we must continue to examine all aspects of our youth resource picture.

Let me summarize now.

Three years ago we were organizing to carry forward the recommendation of Secretary Udall's Task Force on Indian Affairs. Since that time we have, I am convinced, made real progress, particularly on the bedrock issues of Indian education and vocational training.

Here are a few statistics: Total school enrollment of Indian children, to 18 years old, in public, Bureau, and mission and other private schools, rose from 112,746 in 1961 to 121,236 in 1963. In the same period the number of Indian young people attending colleges, universities, and post-high school vocational schools increased from 4,884 in 1961 to 5,431 in 1963.

Similarly, our vocational training program has climbed steadily, fiscal year 1964 showing an enrollment of 4,500, including youth and adults.

Along with stepped-up education programs, new housing programs for Indians have been launched with the help of the Public Housing Administration. Increased health protection through programs of the United States Public Health Service have paralleled education and housing improvements.

But the hard core of our Indians' problem--unemployment--persists. There is no need for me to describe to this audience the poverty which still exists on many Indian reservations. The combination of a growing population and a fixed base of economic resources often makes it extremely difficult to lift per capita income.

Unemployment problems, are not, however, exclusively Indian. We find them today in the half-deserted coal mining towns of Appalachia, in some of the once prospering farming communities of the West, and in Negro sections of both Southern and Northern cities. These are places which, for one reason or another, have been tragically bypassed in America's recent march forward to a higher standard of living.
