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AMERICA INDIAN GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS
Address by MORRIS THOMPSON Commissioner of Indian Affairs to
NATIONAL TRIBAL CHAIRMEN'S ASSOCIATION
Phoenix, Arizona
December 6, 1973

It is a pleasure for me to be with the Tribal Chairmen's Association today. We have a common interest in improving the quality of life for Indian people. The problems that face us are complex and difficult and they will require all the effort we can put against them.

I certainly do not tend to stand here and tell you that l am an expert Indian Affairs. As you well know there's no one who can make that claim. But I have plans and programs that will help build the future for Indian citizens, and I will need your help every step of the way.

In a nutshell, here is the Federal Governments policy today: it offers self-determination and self-government o Indian people as rapidly as Indians want it and can assume responsibility for it. In other words tribes have the option of assuming control of their own Federal programs they wish to do so. Furthermore, they will not be cut off from federal support; they need only demons rate strong and responsible tribal government and the ability to handle programs on their own.

Each of you is a duly elected representative of your tribe. You have achieved this distinction in an election held by your peers according to a constitution. You are the leaders of tribes recognized by the Federal Government and entitled by law to special services from the government. It is therefore appropriate that my first formal meeting as the new Commissioner should be with you, the elected chairman of national tribes.

I hope that you will invite me again and again to discuss our programs and their delivery to our people. It is absolutely essential that we talk with one another --the government, tribal chairmen, and Indian citizens in general --if the Bureau is to be responsive to Indian needs.

You know that Federal programs have been transferred to your hands in many instances so that Indians themselves can shape their direction and manage their operation. This option will continue to be made available. In no cases will the Federal Government abandon its trust relationship with Indian tribes and groups.

Still spending in the congress, in varying stages of progress but not yet into law are 7 pieces of Indian legislation. One of my jobs will be to push hard are 7 pieces of Indian legislation. One of my job will be to push hard for the passage of these bills. If they were all we passed next week, we would be further ahead in self-determination than we have been in 150 years. As a matter of fact, we propose to enlist the help of congressional leaders in getting this legislation through the mill as a Bicentennial present to our nation's first Americans.

One of these pieces of legislation is called the Bloc Grant Program. It would channel an additional $25

million in bloc grants to tribes for economic development. I think you will agree with me that the single most important step in Indian self-help is economic stability on reservations. Any and all programs that strengthen tribal government, develop tribal resources, improve community facilities and create jobs for Indians will get the full support of the Bureau. Second in our priority list to economic development is education. I don't need to tell you how important it is for Indian young people to be properly equipped to compete in today's world.

We are speeding up our education assistance programs and will continue to do so. Much progress has been made in Indian education, particularly in the last ten years. In 1960 only one-fifth of all Indians aged 25 and older had a high school education. Today the figure is better than one third. Since 1950 the number of American Indians attending college has doubled.

Scholarships for Indians going to college have skyrocketed. In 1973 alone, some 14,000 Indian students are receiving scholarship aid. This is 20 times the score of ten years ago, and 5 times the number receiving assistance only 4 years ago. More than 100 of these students are in-law school, and another 100 are in other post-graduate programs.

In my opinion, that's good -- but not good enough. We need better education techniques, better qualified teachers, and more dedication on the part of everyone involved in Indian education. Our goal is quality in elementary schools, in high schools and in college education for Indians.

In land management and land-awards -- dear to the hearts of many Indians this administration has a solid record of achievement. In recent years, Native Americans have received increasingly large restorations of land. The Taos Pueblo received 48,000 acres that had been part of the Carson National Forest in New Mexico. In May 1972, in the state of Washington. 21,000 acres were restored to the Yakima Nation. Alaska Natives will soon begin to get one-twelfth of the land in their state and a sizeable chunk of cash as well --under the provisions of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

I would like to mention also an event unique in American history and unique in the lives of Indians. Last month after years of effort on the part of Indian leaders and non-Indian Americans sympathetic to our goals, the American Indian National Bank was chartered and opened for business.- This bank is the keystone of a financial structure, owned and operated by Indians, that will involve banking operations, industrial capital and insurance services to Indians throughout the United States. Although many people assisted in the project, the one man whose patient work over several years was most responsible for making the Indian Bank a reality is someone you know well -- Marvin Franklin -- my good friend and trusted adviser.

As I get further into my work, I intend to seek the advice and counsel of tribal leaders, individual Indian citizens, Indian organizations, and of course your own Tribal Chairmen's Association.

No one can do this job alone and there is a tremendous amount of work to be done. But we all know what the goals are, and I know you will help me achieve them.