Media Contact: Tom Cantrell, Media Asst. 140 RSOB, Wash., D.C. (202) 225-4721
For Immediate Release: November 2, 1973
Print PDF

(Tulsa, Oklahoma) Senator Dewey F. Bartlett, R-Okla., today called for action by Congress on Indian legislation now pending.

Bartlett, the ranking minority member of the Senate Interior Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, in a speech before the 30th Annual Convention of the National Congress of American Indians in Tulsa, Oklahoma, said, "To carry out a new policy self-determination for Indian tribes), the Administration drafted and submitted to the Congress seven proposals which were designed to implement the new policy he (President Nixon) had recently announced. That was in 1970. We are fast approaching the end of Calendar Year 1973, and we have yet to see any one of the proposals enacted into law. The Congress itself can accept responsibility for this fact.

Bartlett added, "I believe this Administration is trying to keep its promises--but Congress must act on the President I s proposals before this can happen."

He went on to say, "To simply undo the wrongs committed against Indian people is not enough. We must take whatever steps are necessary to insure the Indian people that they will not be accorded a repeat performance and in so doing, direct our efforts in such a manner as to improve upon and strengthen the services delivered to them, and further to insure that from this day forward, Indian people will play a vital role in all actions taken by the Federal Government on their behalf. "

Bartlett zeroed in on three pieces of legislation for special attention.

The injustices suffered by the Menominee people because of termination have been very clearly documented, and I feel very strongly that the Federal Government has no other alternatives but to abide by the wishes of the Menominee and reinstitute them as a federally recognized tribe," Bartlett stated.

Bartlett added that he has introduced legislation to do just said, "I sincerely hope that the Congress, with the proven effects of such a policy fresh in their minds, will see fit to take expeditious action to repudiate this policy and replace it with one that expresses the wishes and desires of the Indian people."

On another front, Bartlett called for the establishment of an Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior.

I feel very strongly that the proper place for that position is at a level that would insure a direct line of authority to and direct contact with the Secretary of the Interior," he said.

Bartlett contends that any obstacles, "human and otherwise" that interfere with that direct line of authority and direct contact with the Secretary of the Interior should be removed.

According to Bartlett, this appointee, "should be given full responsibility for the administration of programs of the BIA, after consultation with Indian tribes; should have final say subject to the Secretary of the Interior, on all matters pertaining to their operation.

After noting recently-nominated BIA Commissioner Mr. Morris Thompson's "dedication to serving faithfully the Indian people," Bartlett said, " it confirmed, he will need the full support and cooperation of all Indian people throughout these United States if he is to be success in achieving the stated goals of the Indian people "

Bartlett also mentioned a third piece of legislation which is desi6ned to moderate a comprehensive review of the policies, practices and structures of Federal agencies charged with protecting Indian resources and providing services to Indians; examine existing statutes and procedures; consider methods of strengthening tribal government, and secure adequate protection of fundamental rights from official arise.

Bartlett voiced his support of the concept of this legislation and said, a study of this scope is long overdue.

Bartlett said he had amended this bill to establish a private sector task force to conduct a management study of the BIA.

A study of this kind should be able to make recommendations which result in savings which would "swing the pendulum" in the direction of more appropriated funds reaching the reservation.

A similar study was made of state government operation during Bartlett's tenure as Oklahoma's Governor and resulted in "an annual savings of $20 million and a great increase in efficiency."

"It is this same kind of study that I envision for the BIA," he said Bartlett said he opposes legislation proposed by Senator James A. Abourezk, D-S .D., to require an annual authorization of appropriations for the BIA. "This bill could result in good programs expiring because of Congressional inaction or interest in other areas of responsibility Bartlett said.

added, “It is my strong feeling that enactment of this legislation would be a step backward in the Federal Government's efforts to improve services to Indian people, a. step which the Indians can ill afford.”