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Remarks by the honorable Casper W. Weinberger Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare.
Before National Congress of American Indians Tulsa, Oklahoma October 30, 1973

It is a very great honor to appear before this distinguished audience.

I know that you are aware that the problems of Native Americans are gathering, day by day, an increasing and long overdue awareness and commitment in the conscience of all Americans - and certainly with the United States government.

NOTE: This text is the basis of Secretary Weinberger's oral remarks. It should be used with the understanding that some material may be added or omitted during presentation.

¬But I am sure that even at this late hour, we still do not fully comprehend all that needs to be done to make our constitutional pledge of equality a living and meaningful reality for Indians,

I do believe, however, that our failings now are more of omission than commission more from misunderstanding of the needs, rather than any plot to deny rights and needed programs, and one of the things I hope to learn more about, and quickly is your real needs.

I hope and I trust that our awareness of those needs will us to develop that basic understanding necessary for beginning on a new Indian era in which - as president Nixon has declared - "The Indian future is determined by Indian acts and Indian decisions,"

We think we may have made such a start, l would like to talk to you today about our department's expanding role in Indian affairs.

Is a department which serves people: and even more important helps people help themselves.

Our people are experienced in dealing with the basic problems that plague you - such as poverty, bad health, isolation, discrimination, inferior education, negligible economic opportunity, alcoholism and matters of social welfare - problems that are not unique to any one people or race,

So the very fact that some additional Indian programs are now lodged with hew is a step forward - the Indian programs. In hew will be nurtured, sustained and enhanced by all our other programs and people who deal every day with the problems of the disadvantaged,

As we work more with you on these matters of grave mutual concern, he will be doing so with an acute awareness of the treaty relationship and the deep obligation we have to you as native citizens of this land.

In particular, l want to allay any fears you might have that, in our concern for you as a people, we might lose sight of your traditional concern for and desire to retain natural Resources. We know of your never-ending struggle to enjoy them,

We can assure you that our delivery of hew services will never depend on the relinquishment by you of any of those natural resources.

While we stand ready to acknowledge that all our problems both historic and contemporary have not been solved. There has been some progress and that should not be overlooked.

Total federal funding for Indian affairs has substantially increased. But more important is the fact that Indian are given more control over how that money will be spent. It is increasingly being put in the hands of tribal governments and other Indian organizations. This is true with economic development funds and it is true with HEW programs and money.

In recognition of your convention theme, "restoration now," we should note that some lands are being restored to their rightful native American owners - 48,000 acres of sacred land near blue lake to the Taos pueblo; 21,000 acres to the Yakima nation; the use of pyramid lake waters to the Paiute tribe; and most recently, the house overwhelmingly passed A.

That would restore land and government services to the Menominee tribe of Wisconsin, as the president made clear in his message to the convention, we sincerely hope that this will pass the Senate so it may be signed by the president.

I am aware that one reason why l was invited to address the convention is because you are looking to my department as

A new ally in the struggle to improve the living conditions and opportunities for the Indian people, it is right that you should,

- for 18 years, we have administered the Indian health program since it was transferred from the interior department,

- last year, the Indian education act gave our office

Of education new responsibilities,

- and this year, we acquired the office of economic opportunity's Indian program.

I want to mention here that our department has taken over more from the office of economic opportunity than just some of the OEO programs, our undersecretary of hew - the department's second officer - is Frank Carlucci, the former director of OEO who has been intimately involved in the management of Indian programs for a number of years,

Frank and I work together constantly, and his advice to me on policy development is invaluable, thus you may be certain that our continuing scrutiny of Indian programs takes place at the top, as well as in the various operating bureaus and agencies.

So HEW obviously is gaining a greater stake in your future. I can assure you that we are making every effort to bring greater knowledge and even more effort to the programs we administer for the benefit of the Indian people.

In order to help me assess our total efforts in Indian programs, I will be looking to the new office of Native American programs under the assistant secretary of human development,

This new assistant secretary ship was created right after I came to the department to establish a central place at the highest level of the department to work on sensitive human problems in which we have a special interest.

The new office will administer the special Indian self-determination programs but a major change will be made in the way these programs operate this fiscal year, the grants will be made directly to tribal councils, who may then select administering agencies or use the funds in other ways that will carry out the administration's policy of self-determination for Indians.

An expanded budget in this program will enable tribal councils to determine their own priorities, and fund them

Accordingly, we do intend, as well, to give special emphasis to urban Indian centers.

A new responsibility entrusted to the department is the program of grants authorized by the Indian education act.

Which congress enacted last year, the program will be administered by a deputy commissioner of Indian education, we actively solicited and are now reviewing the suggestions of the national advisory council on Indian education for a person to be appointed to this high post.

So that the school districts can develop their funding plans, I am announcing today that the 1974 funds - $40 million have been released and will be allocated by hew.

To assure Indian participation in this new program, the act requires that all projects receiving funds must be developed in cooperation with the Indian population to be served, including tribes, parents and, where applicable, the students themselves.

The office of education will continue to provide additional funds under the more traditional impact aid program and title

I of the elementary and secondary education act which focuses money on disadvantaged children, but we hope that under the leadership of a deputy commissioner, who is himself a Native American, that all our education programs will better meet

What you perceive to be the needs of your children.

Education is a key to self-determination and education will receive heavy hew emphasis as we move down the road that leads to full self-determination,

Another new effort we have under way is being administered by a special Indian-Alaska native desk within our national institute of alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

We are well aware of the concern you have for alcoholism, the abuses and desolation your people have suffered is underlined by the fact that this problem affects an estimated 50 to 80 percent of all Indian families. We know the havoc this creates disrupting both family ad tribal life-exactly as it also affects millions of non-Indians. We know it a disadvantage and we intend to fight it as a disease that can be co trolled or cured

Alcoholism among Native Americans is a priority effort within the NIAAA, currently we are funding 140

projects, a third of which are serving urban Indians arm the remainder are based on reservations. About so of these 'projects were transferred last year from the office of economic opportunity, last year funding totaled $6,8 million and this year we expect to spend nearly $7 million on alcoholism treatment and rehabilitation services for Indians and Alaska Natives at the community level - in larger cities rural areas, and on reservations.

This special program was something we initiated administratively by ourselves. There has no legislation mandating such a program. Our approach basically is to give the Indian and Alaska native people the resources so they may themselves solve their alcoholism problems, we also made a grant to the American Indian commission on alcoholism. Drug abuse, which has an all-Indian staff and is providing technical assistance to the individual projects.

As far as the general health program is concerned, I think know well the gains it has brought about in the past 18 years - the increasing numbers of people being served and favorable impact this has had on death rates and the reduction of serious illness, but you also know that we are intensifying our efforts in this struggle of ours to bring the health of native Americans up to that of the general population, that is why we are spending more money on Indian health, building more hospitals, and bringing more Indians into the service than ever before,

Obviously, this is no time to slacken our momentum and we have no intention of doing so, we expect to spend over $200 million this year - almost double the 1969 level, our goal is to raise the health of the 489,000 American Indians and Alaska natives for whom we are responsible, to the highest possible level.

Toward this end, we have greatly expanded opportunities for Native Americans to build health careers within the Indian health service.

At the present time, more than 53 percent of the 7,142 full-time personnel of IHS are Indians and Alaska natives. Many of these people have been trained in our special schools and courses conducted by IHS, all-Indian tribal boards participate fully with IHS staff in planning, operating, and evaluating the health program at every administrative level.

Our office of health manpower opportunities has trained more than 4,000 Indians and Alaska natives as allied health professionals, more than 1,600 have been trained in health leadership and health management positions and for further advancement into the health professions - including physician training, registered nurse programs for practical nurses, and special nurse training in obstetrics,

In our recent reorganization of the health area, we moved from an advocacy type structure to a functional approach, previously one person had represented each principal minority group, including one for the American Indians on a functional basis, however, recognizing the unique relationship between the federal government and the American Indian, we made special provisions for the American Indian by establishing a liaison office for Indian affairs in the new health resources administration whose responsibility it would be to coordinate the activities of that agency with the Indian health services in hew, the bureau of Indian affairs in DOI and so forth.

there are noteworthy developments in the activities of HEW's office for civil rights, which is responsible for administering title vi of the civil rights act of 1964 for many years this office was totally absorbed by the effort to bring about the elimination of the Southern - black white - "dual school system,"

The last three years, however, the office of civil rights has articulated and begun to enforce actively a policy, which requires school districts to remove barriers to equal educational services for Indian children - resulting from the failure by school districts to appreciate and reflect the rich cultural and linguistic heritage of Indian Children.

We believe the educational development and achievement of Indian children should not be restricted by the failure of school districts to create educational environments which reflect and value the language and cultural heritage of Indian children just as they reflect and value the language and cultural heritage of non-Indian children, compliance activities underway in Wisconsin, Arizona, and New Mexico have stressed this very important point, in the area of financial assistance to Indian students in colleges and universities, the office of civil rights will soon release a memorandum which will address the concerns raised by many Indian students regarding the distribution of federal financial aid for higher education, our objective is to eliminate discrimination wherever we find it.

Similarly, a memorandum of understanding among the office of civil rights, the Indian health service, and the medical services administration of hew has been finalized which will prohibit any state or local hospital or extended care facility from turning away Indian patients who choose to be treated there because such patients are also eligible for benefits from the Indian health service, further, the memorandum of understanding establishes a system to prevent Indian people from being turned away from state and local health care facilities because of an alleged inability to pay.

I hope that you can see as we do in all these various steps a beginning of that new Indian era of self-determination that we all seek, but possibly more important than individual programs and funds - in the long range - might be our basic approach, instead of telling you what we are going to do, l am interested in asking you what you believe we should be doing - and what you think we are doing wrong, I came here fully as much to learn as to talk.

This month, the hew office of Native American programs began a series of six regional meetings to receive Indian advice and recommendations - and complaints - on activities the new office should undertake, such meetings already have taken place at the reservations at warm springs, Oregon, and fort Berthold, North Dakota.

I urge you, and all Indians, to take a full, unconstrained part in these sessions - let us have your recommendation and suggestions and ideas, we plan to consult you on a regular basis and we want our programs to reflect Indian needs and desires.

In the past, I fear, the federal approach was that we knew the answers and we proclaimed those answers with the bold and total confidence that only uninformed people can project.

Now, at least, we are conceding that we don't know the answers, and we are setting out to learn, work on education programs for us as we work on education programs for you.

So there are some signs of new directions and we trust that our listening and learning can be counted as one of the most promising.

We know that our efforts are late by decades, not by months or weeks.

We know that our past efforts have been only partial and tentative successes.

But we also know of the depth of our commitment and that can be the most important fact of all, because our long story has demonstrated at least one thing: we can do what we want to do.

So I pledge you our very best efforts at compassion that works, compassion works that is built on deeds and not words. And I pledge you my total personal involvement, commitment and cooperation.