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It is real pleasure to be back in Oklahoma and meeting once again with so many of the State's fine Indian people and with delegates to the NCAI annual convention. All of us, it seems to me, owe a hearty debt of thanks to our good friend and host, Bill Keeler, for making this gathering possible and bringing us together in such excellent surroundings.

Because this is the first public meeting I have had in many months with Indian people from a large number of tribal groups from various parts of the country, I would like in take this occasion to give you a kind of progress report. My thought is not to cover every phase of Indian affairs but to concentrate on the three main fields where I believe all of us are agreed that Indian progress is especially important. These are health, education, and economic development.

In the field of health, it seems to me that the picture is now brighter and more promising than ever before. As most of you doubtless know, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of the Interior were strongly in favor of the legislation adopted about three years ago which transferred the whole Indian health program over to the Public Health Service. We favored it even though it meant a substantial reduction in the scope of our Indian Bureau operations because we felt that such a transfer would be beneficial to the Indians both immediately and over the longer term of years.

In the 27 months or so since the Public Health Service took over the program on July 1, 1955, it seems to me that our judgment on this has been pretty well vindicated. Today the funds available for health work among the Indian people are just about twice as large as they were during the last fiscal year the Bureau had responsibility for the program. In the meantime the health facilities and the trained personnel available for serving Indian people have been substantially increased. Continuing progress has been achieved in preventive medicine and sanitation work on the reservations. And there is every reason for confidence, I understand, that the rates of infectious disease like tuberculosis and the rates of infant mortality, which have been so shockingly high in many Indian areas, will be significantly reduced in the reasonably near future.

In the field of education, where the Indian Bureau continues to carry the responsibility, there are many encouraging items of progress to report.

First, let us take a look at elementary and secondary education--the ordinary schooling through the 12th grade which is provided for children between the ages of six and 18. In the school year that ended last June we had a record number of Indian children - over 132,000 – enrolled in schools of all types. On the Navajo Reservation, where we faced a real emergency four years ago with only about half of the 28,000 school-age children actually enrolled, the enrollment has been nearly doubled and was a little over 27,000 last spring. Perhaps even more important is the fact that we had just about twice as many Indian children in the public schools of the country last year as we had in our Indian Service schools both on and off the reservations. The actual figures were about 76,000 in the public schools as against approximately 38,000 in the Federal facilities and roughly 11,000 in mission schools and other types. When you bear in mind that there were less than 300 Indian children altogether enrolled in the public schools of the Nation at the beginning of the present century, you begin to get some true measure of

the progress that has been achieved.

This is not to suggest, however, that all problems in Indian education have been solved or that we have any grounds for complacency. Actually the Bureau faces a severe challenge in finding public school opportunities or in providing Federal facilities for a rapidly increasing school-age Indian population. We must continue emphasizing a type of education which will facilitate the adjustment of children from non-English-speaking homes to the ways of modern American life. And we must work constantly to close the educational gap that now exists between the Indian and the non-Indian populations of the country. For the non-Indian ,people the median educational level is now approximately the 10th grade; for the Indians it is just about half as much. All of these problems deserve--and will have--our continuing attention in the years that lie ahead.

When we look beyond the 12th grade at Indian enrollment in colleges and universities, the picture is in some ways even more impressive than it is at the lower levels. As recently as 1935, according to the best reports we have in the Bureau, there were only about 800 Indian youngsters from reservations or similar areas enrolled in institutions of higher learning throughout the country. Last year, by contrast, there were over 2,800. And this year I feel sure the figure will be considerably higher.

Moreover, the funds available from private and public sources for assisting young Indians to obtain a higher education are constantly increasing. Several of the tribes such as the Navajo, the Nez Perce and the Jicarilla Arapahos have recently established their own scholarship funds with tribal monies. Educational grants and loans for Indian youth from foundations and other private organizations are undoubtedly more plentiful than ever before. And this year, for the first time, the proceeds of the nationally known Knickerbocker Ball, which will be held in New York City in November, will be devoted in large part to assisting qualified Indian youngsters in meeting the needs of a college or university education.

At the other end of the educational scale we have the many thousands of grownup' Indian men and women living on reservations today who were unfortunate enough to miss the advantages of schooling in their youth. In some Indian areas these illiterate or inadequately educated people represent only a very small fraction of the population--not much more than you would expect to find in the typical American community. However, in other areas such as Seminole of Florida, they represent a very large segment, perhaps even a majority, of the whole adult tribal population. Where this is the situation, we face a most challenging and stimulating assignment in helping these people to achieve some satisfactory adjustment to the way of life they find around them.

All of this was brought home to me quite forcefully about three years ago during my first visit with the Seminoles of Florida. At each of the three reservations where we held our meetings it was necessary to have an interpreter and my remarks were translated, practically a sentence at a time, into the native language for the benefit of my listeners. At the conclusion of each of my talks I asked the members of the audience whether they would like an opportunity to learn how to speak and read and write the English language and whether they would take advantage of such an opportunity if offered. If I live to be 100, I don’t suppose I ever will forget the reactions of those people. Even the older women, who traditionally take little part in the tribal affairs and usually sit around on the outer edges of the gathering, were almost unbelievably enthusiastic. On all three reservations they raised their hands practically 100 percent and their faces lighted up with an eagerness which was really wonderful to see. It was one of the most touching and heart-warming experiences I have ever had in my life.

Several months later, just as soon as we could get together the necessary funds, we launched an adult education program on a kind of trial basis not only in the Florida jurisdiction but also on four other reservations where the need was especially marked--Fort Hall in Idaho, Rosebud Sioux in South Dakota, Turtle Mountain in North Dakota, and Papago in Arizona. Over the past two years, I am happy to report, this program has produced some highly encouraging results and we have now taken it out of the experimental category and made it a part of our regular annual budget. This year we are not only continuing the program at the original five reservations; we are also initiating it on 12 additional reservations, at 39 trailer locations on the Navajo Reservation, and at 10 locations in Alaska.

Turning now to the economic opportunity phases of our work in the Bureau, I want to mention first some of the recent highlights in resource development on Indian lands. Probably the most impressive item has been the tremendous increase in tribal and individual income from oil and gas leasing. In the fiscal year which ended last June, the total of bonuses, rents and royalties received from this source amounted to over $72,000,000 which was not only a record but about 75 percent higher than the comparable figure of $41,000,000 for the previous fiscal year. Admittedly, this income is rather unevenly distributed among the Indian population of the country and there are, of course, many dozens of tribal groups which have not shared at all in its benefits. Nevertheless, it has been exceedingly important to the more fortunate tribes and has made possible many beneficial new programs including some of the tribal scholarship funds I have already mentioned.

Over and beyond this, we are continuing and intensifying our other lines of work to protect and develop the Indian owned resources. Over the past four fiscal years we have been devoting more money and more manpower to our resource programs than ever before in the history of the Bureau--in fact, just about one and a half times as much money as during the preceding four years. As a result, we are gradually extending soil conservation measures over the Indian lands that need protection, putting our land records and realty procedures in better shape, and developing up-to-date inventories of Indian timber resources. We are also enlarging and extending irrigation systems, wherever feasible, developing new sources of range water supply, and building and improving badly needed reservation roads.

All of this work, of course, is aimed at bringing the Indian lands and other resources up to the highest level of productivity, consistent with conservation principles, so that they will yield the maximum income for the Indian owners. It is one way of broadening the range of economic opportunities for the Indian people. But it is not and never can be, I am afraid, the complete answer to all their economic problems.

For we do have to face the fact that the population on most reservations and similar areas has already outgrown the resource base and is getting bigger all the time. Largely because of this fact, we are carrying forward our relocation services program to provide a kind of outlet for the Indian people who are unable to make a decent living from reservation lands and those who prefer to engage in some nonagricultural line of work. As some of you probably know, we now have a total of 12 relocation offices in communities all the way from Cleveland, Ohio, on the east to San Francisco and Los Angeles on the Pacific Coast. Over the past year or two we have greatly broadened the range of services we provide through these offices and have extended assistance to a steadily increasing flow of relocating Indian workers and families. In fact, during the first quarter of the present fiscal year we assisted almost twice as many people under this program as we did during the comparable period last year – 1,527 as against 814.

In other words, the interest of Indian people in relocation opportunities shows no signs of flagging and we undoubtedly face quite a challenge in keeping up with the demand 9 Nevertheless, I want to emphasize here as I have so many times before that we are NOT looking upon relocation--we never have looked upon it--as the total answer to all Indian problems. We recognize that there are many thousands of Indian people, especially in the middle-aged and older generations, who have no desire to move away from their present locations and would probably have a hard time of it if they did. So we are keying our programs to the needs and wishes of these people in addition to providing relocation services.
