Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: September 21, 1961
Print PDF

Words are inadequate to express the pleasure with which I come to Lewiston to talk to my friends in the National Congress of American Indians.

I bring with me greetings and good wishes from the Secretary of the Interior, Stewart L. Udall. Few Secretaries of the Interior since Harold Ickes have taken the keen personal interest in Indian Affairs that Secretary Udall does. As a Congressman he had more Indians in his district than any other. He served on the Indian Affairs Subcommittee of the House of Representatives. It was his idea to create a Task Force, and it was his idea to get W. W. Keeler to head it. Under his leadership and direction we are going to have one of the truly great periods of Indian advancement.

This is now your 18th Annual Convention. From your first meeting 1944 until this convention today you have continued to grow in numbers and in stature.

Throughout this whole period I have had the good fortune to be closely associated with many of your leaders. I had the pleasure of spending Saturday with your first President, Judge Johnson, in eastern Oklahoma, only a few weeks ago.

Your third president, Joseph Garry, and I are very old associates. I also had the pleasure of visiting with him this summer when I was passing through Idaho. That Joe Garry should have been named American Indian of the Year at Sheridan, Wyoming, comes as no surprise and is a source of much pleasure to me as well as to his other friends.

Your current President, Mr. Clarence Wesley, and I are also associates of some years standing. President Wesley served as a consultant to the Secretary of the Interior and an advisor to the Task Force during the preparation of our report. It is always a pleasure to work with him and I am happy to be with him today.

In October 1953, a young woman from Denver, who had been associated with the Mayor's Commission on Human Relations, came to Washington, D. C. to represent the National Congress of American Indians full time in the Nation's Capital. I have been working with her ever since, and I have developed both affection and respect for her. She has served you well and has stood up for the cause of Indian rights on many occasions. I am very glad we were able to stand shoulder to shoulder during the legislative crisis in the fall of 1953.

I remind you of these things because I want you to know that the National Congress of American Indians and I are not strangers. Over the years I associate the NCAI with a vigorous defense of Indian rights. Among them is the right of tribal organizations to receive both recognition and support. The NCAI is the only national organization composed chiefly of organized tribes. It is important that there should be a strong, stable, national organization of this type.

The National Congress has also been a strong protector over the years of individual Indian rights. Ours is a government devoted to the preservation of individual liberties. Among the nations of the world we

strive to strike a balance between personal freedom and the needs of society as a whole. American Indians are citizens of the United States and of the states in which they reside. As citizens they are entitled to the immunities and privileges of citizenship and to the equal protection of the laws; but they also have the responsibilities that go with citizenship.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs is very seriously concerned about the rights and responsibilities of both the tribes and of individual Indians and so is the National Congress of American Indians. The Bureau neither wants nor expects complacent support; we know that we are never going to agree at all times. But we are natural allies for we are dealing, each in his own way, with the same problems and with a generally similar outlook. I intend to work with you and to help you as best I can to grow and to prosper.

Let me say here and now that I have had a pleasant working relationship during the past several months with the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Mr. John O. Crow. He will be the Deputy Commissioner for the next few years. The partnership we have is symbolic of the work that Indians and non-Indians must do side by side to achieve our goal: full participation by American Indians in all aspects of our national life.

We are meeting in the home state of two strong leaders in Indian Affairs: Senator Frank Church and Assistant Secretary Carver.

For the past year or more I have been closely in touch with Senator Church on many matters of Indian welfare. We have discussed Indian Affairs philosophically, and in every other way that two good friends can talk about a matter that is meaningful to each of them. I have the utmost respect for Senator Church's sincerity and for the deep conviction with which he approaches matters of Indian welfare. As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Indian Affairs of the United States Senate, he is in a position to take helpful and constructive action of great importance to Indians throughout the whole country. All of us, but especially members of the National Congress of American Indians, are very lucky to have such a man as Senator Frank Church in this key position. The task of Chairing the Subcommittee, which has a tremendous volume of legislation passing through it, is arduous, and we welcome Senator Church's dedication to this important role.

Since January of this year I have had the good fortune to be connected with Assistant Secretary of the Interior John Carver, Jr. He brings to his policymaking position broad experience in both the administrative and legislative branches of government, as well as in the practice of law. He also brings a warm heart and a willingness to think hard about difficult problems. He has come to be a good friend of mine and I assure you that he is also a good friend of yours.

This is my second visit to Lewiston this year. Earlier this summer I had a wonderful three days in this State in which I was able to see at first hand and for the first time three of the Idaho reservations: Coeur d'Alene, Nez Perce and Fort Hall.

Here in Lewiston I had the pleasure of making an airplane tour of the area. This wonderful and beautiful country with its tremendous economic potential, and its great possibilities for recreation development, offers a promise which must be fulfilled. It is a source of much satisfaction to me that the Lewiston people with whom I visited--Bill Johnston of the Lewiston Journal and Ted Little--are determined that the Indian people shall share in their plans for economic improvement. That is the way it should be. It is a feeling that I know is shared by the Nez Perce tribal leaders because we met at Kamiah and explored the Clearwater together. To have close cooperation between Indians and non-

Indians for the good of all is a long tradition among the Nez Perce.

In the summer of 1805 the expedition of Lewis and Clark made its way over the mountains from the east into this valley. They arrived in desperate condition; they were approaching starvation; they were eating their horses; they were weakened and were in a state of lowered morale. As they came into this valley they found a group of Indians they called Chopunnish which was translated to them as Pierced Nose or Nez Perce.

Here they were provided with maps drawn on white neck elk skin; they were provided with interpreters and with food and their clothing was repaired. They had come down out of the early snows in the mountains and they were sore-footed. They made up their minds to continue their voyage by canoe, which they modeled after the Indian dugouts. They made enough canoes to transport their whole party and all their supplies down the Clearwater, the Snake and the Columbia. The Nez Perce took care of their horses over the winter.

This was the expedition sponsored by President Jefferson that linked the two sides of this continent 0 The next time somebody wants to make a movie about cowboys and Indians perhaps it would be a good idea if they were to come and make a movie on location here and show how the explorers who opened up the great Northwest were enabled to do so by the kindness, the hospitality and by the charity--if you please, by the welfare service--provided by the Indians who welcomed them.

But that was the Old Frontier.

Let us turn to the New Frontier.

Since February of this year I have had the honor of serving as a member of a Task Force on Indian Affairs appointed by the Secretary of the Interior. Everyone in this room knows that the report was submitted in July; and that members of the Task Force were W. W. Keeler, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation; William Zimmerman, Jr., former Assistant Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and James Officer, an anthropologist from the University of Arizona} as well as myself.

On the 12th of July Secretary Udall gave general approval to the report. In its broad outlines it is quite clear that our report will be a chart for the course to be followed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs during the months and years that lie ahead. What is the nature of this report?

First: The report itself grew out of consultation with Indian leaders and with the Indian people. We traveled 15;000 miles; and we talked to the representatives of 200 organized tribes. We met face to face with a couple of thousand Indians and their friends; and we visited a number of reservations and off reservation communities. So although, we are the authors of the report in the sense that we wrote the words down on paper, the ideas in this report are yours. To be sure, if we didn’t agree with them we wouldn’t have made the recommendations. But by and large this is a product of the Indian leaders' own thinking. are merely the reporters who gathered them together and put them down in written form.

Second: This is a program that can be put into operation. The goals that we stated are attainable within the existing framework of authority and of appropriations. In other words, this is not a dream of the future but an action program that can be followed now.

And thirdly: This is a developmental report. This report deals with recommendations for programs that will provide maximum development and use of the natural resources which are your greatest asset.

Perhaps even more important: these programs will provide for the development of people and that, after all, is why we are in business. Ours is not a materialistic approach. We are interested in the wise use of natural resources so that the men, women, and children who live on and near Indian reservations may have a better life. That means; better housing, better health, more income, more education, better training, more and better opportunity for steady work at better wages.

Let us begin by talking about the development of physical resources in the Indian country. Much development has been achieved on the reservations during the past 30 years by tribal and individual enterprise with practical help and technical guidance from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. If we take the 53,000,000 acres of Indian land that is in trust or restricted status and regard it as a whole unit, it is safe to say that we are producing far more income with it than 30 years ago or even 10. But it is also clear that the potential of these 53,000,000 acres has never come anywhere near fulfillment.

The existing land base could be much more profitably utilized if it were worked by its Indian owners instead of being leased, as it is so often, to non-Indian tenants. In addition to that, several hundred thousand acres of additional lands have irrigation potential but have not yet been brought under ditch. Continuing progress on this front is essential for two reasons: First, to improve the economic well-being of the Indian landowners; but also, to safeguard the valuable water rights that go with the land under various laws and court decisions, both of the Federal Government and of the States.

One of the most pressing of all Indian land problems is that which follows from the multiple ownership of land which has passed undivided to heirs of an allottee. There are now more than 10 percent of the total Indian estate--and of this land nearly a half a million acres have been found by the Senate Committee on Interior and Indian Affairs to be unproductive because of multiple ownership. Generally speaking, there are so many owners that the consent of all of them cannot be obtained to a lease.

There are some instances of checks being drawn for just a few cents. Such income means very little to the Indian owner. The cost of managing it is out of reason and brings severe criticism from Congress and from Indian groups and friends of the Indians. The solution of this problem will not wait upon our convenience. A solution is needed now.

The distinguished Senator from Idaho, Mr. Church, has offered a bill, which provides one solution: loan the tribes the money so they can buy up the multiple interests.

The Secretary of the Interior has offered another solution: permit the tribes to buy the multiple interests on the installment plan.

Out of these two bills a composite solution must be found. I hope and believe it will be found in the next session of Congress. I pledge my best efforts to work toward a common sense solution of this intensely important problem.

We are pushing with timber inventories on the commercially important Indian forest lands. The purpose is to provide better information on which to base cutting schedules. Forest inventories have now been completed on about three fourths of the area. Inventories pay for themselves not only in planning but in increased Indian income. The annual cut from Indian forested lands can eventually be increased by somewhere in the neighborhood of a hundred million board-feet every year above the level in recent years, and all without hurting the basic forest.

Some tribal groups are favored by nature with rich deposits of oil, gas and other minerals which have

recently been discovered, are being commercially developed and are producing substantial tribal income. A full program of resource development would provide for the use of the best modern techniques in minerals exploration and development throughout the entire Indian country.

One of the great potentials for Indian resource development is in the field of recreation. Our national population is growing, and will continue to grow for some decades, at an explosive rate. As the work week shortens, and as the ease of travel increases, the demand on recreation facilities throughout, the entire Nation will multiply faster than anyone could have imagined a few years ago. So the recreation industry, which is already big business, will become increasingly bigger business in the immediate future, and its growth will continue for a long time to come.

Think of the potential tourist attractions on many of our Indian reservations: Trout streams, natural lakes, man-made lakes, scenery, history, Indian arts and crafts. Careful planning is essential. It is necessary to maintain high standards because our national parks and our State parks have accustomed people to high quality facilities. But it seems clear that recreation is a richly promising field for Indian economic development.

Let us turn our attention for a moment to the question of industrial development. As mechanization and automation have moved into farming and ranching the opportunities for seasonal unskilled labor become smaller every year. This hits the Indian worker harder than others. How can we meet this situation? One: By economic development measures of the types I have just described we can stimulate a wage economy in the preservation areas, using the natural resources and the labor potential that are already there, adding to them capital from the loan fund. Management skill and trained workers are an essential ingredient of successful economic development. It is greatly desired that Indian tribes with assets in the form of income, cash or judgment moneys should contribute from their own capital to the fullest extent possible. Two: We can bring manufacturing employment to the reservation areas through special inducements, such as plant sites, facilities, and on-the-job training programs. This is industrial development. We have on-going programs of this type in a small number of reservations. It was the Task Force’s hope and thought that these can be substantially and swiftly increased. Industrial development, to be permanent, must be coordinated with education and vocational training programs. It must be accompanied by stable conditions of law and order and the economic and business climate which makes it attractive for manufacturing industries to locate on the reservations.

Third: a depressed reservation area can be improved by bringing individual Indians into contact with areas of greater opportunity. This means education in the broad sense; it means vocational training; it means job placement; and for those who wish it, it means relocation.

All these programs should be related to planned economic development. They are not compulsory programs. They are programs of opportunity and service. Each one of these activities has its place in a total program of reservation development. We need your help and understanding in order to make them work for Indian betterment. Education, vocational training, industrial development, job placement and relocation: These are the programs that bridge the gap between the development of natural resources and the development of people. Let's start by talking about education.

We Americans place great faith in the possibilities of education. We are inclined to think that education will solve all OUT problems if we just give it a chance. The fact that Indians share this great American faith shows how far the values of our cultures have become intertwined. But, it should be a source of concern to all of us that in all the years we have been working at this problem we still find that adult

Indians living on reservations are on the average only half as well schooled as adults elsewhere. Our failures in education are also reflected in the large number of Indians who have no occupational skills; and these failures are in turn reflected in grim statistics of poverty, delinquency and dependency.

All of us working together face a major challenge in schooling and in vocational preparation. This is one of the things the Task Force meant when we suggested concentration on programs of development.

We are still short five thousand classroom seats to accommodate children of school age who are not now enrolled in any school; State, Federal or private. We need to relieve the overcrowding which has developed in many existing Bureau schools. We need to replace obsolete and dilapidated structures with up-to-date facilities. A good start has already been made, but with the population growth that faces us on the reservations we have a major challenge in this area alone.

We also ought to be working continuously on the quality of our classroom instruction. The children who come from non-English speaking homes have special needs and we want to be certain that those needs are being met. In all these matters the basic aim is to insure that the present and future generations of Indian children will receive the same educational advantages, the same educational opportunities as other children throughout the country. It is not a simple problem, and it is a very important one.

Adults beyond school age also have an intensive need. Many adults on the reservations have had little or no formal schooling in their youth. They need an educational program suited to their special situation, and our programs in this direction are just beginning.

The next generations I leaders will need to be college graduates trained in specialized schools of many kinds. But such schools accept only high school graduates; and the drop out rate of Indian youngsters in high school is very high. We need programs to make certain that we are not losing potential leaders through high school drop-out and that we have more scholarship aid for Indian high school graduates.

Because we have in mind the tremendous educational need on our reservations, let us not under-estimate the accomplishments of the Federal Indian educational system. In 1871, at the end of the treaty period, the reservations were mostly remote, roadless, Wilderness, arctic and desert areas. The Federal Government, first introduced elementary schools, then high schools, and more recently has added a scholarship program for higher education. This program has guided three generations of American Indians through the difficult years of acculturation to our industrial society and we should give it full credit for its achievements as we discuss the many serious problems that still remain.

One of the most encouraging programs at the present time is adult vocational training. I am glad to report that the Congress has approved legislation to train more adult Indians in vocational schools and in industrial plants on-the-job. If Congress provides the funds we have requested, we hope to increase that program in the current fiscal year and to double it as quickly as possible. It is one of the most satisfying and desirable programs from the standpoint of Indian participation. I think you may be interested in some of these figures.

Nearly 4,000 Indians have received training under this program up to the present time. Of those who have completed institutional training, 81 percent were gainfully and permanently employed in May of this year. Of those who were obliged to drop out for one reason or another more than half were gainfully and permanently employed at the same time. This gives us a rough idea of what vocational training and education for adults can do to raise the standard of living and improve opportunities for Indian citizens. This record of achievement compares more than favorably with history under the G. I.

Bill of Rights. In adult vocational training we have a program the Bureau likes, the Indians like and Congress likes. The figures show that it is an effective program. This is a perfect example of what the Task Force meant by programs of human development.

I am confident that this program will grow and grow through the years because it is a program that pays; it pays the Indian people--it pays the taxpayer; and it pays in the rich satisfaction of human beings improving their way of life.

We have other programs that are not as far along as the adult vocational training program. For example, we hope to see a return to the greater use of the Federally employed work force, the so-called "force account" method of carrying out construction jobs needed on the reservations. The Task Force heard from many men who had received a start in life by the training they received in doing construction work under "force account."

A like number, perhaps even more, told us of their activities in the old CCC and urged us strongly to press for the establishment of the Youth Conservation Corps. Such a corps could provide young Indian men with opportunities for healthy outdoor work, for wage income, and for training. At the same time it would advance the conservation and development of natural resources on and near the reservations. Such a program would require legislation but I am sure that the Bureau would look upon it with great interest and sympathy.

Intertwined with all programs of human and natural resource development is the great need for housing on the reservations. The Task Force with careful deliberation used the phrase "truly shocking" to describe the housing conditions it saw.

Throughout this entire Nation means have been found in the urban-industrial areas to bring Federal assistance in the form of public housing, housing for elderly people, housing for educational institutions, etc.

But until the New Frontier arrived none of these measures had been brought to bear in the Indian country.

I am glad to report to you than on Wednesday morning of this week The President of the United States took part in a ceremony by which the first application for a public housing project on an Indian reservation was approved. We propose a new branch in the Bureau, the Branch of Housing, which will devote full time to finding out how to bring to bear on the reservations the resources of the Housing Agency which has already done so much good throughout the rest of the Nation.

Now one last thought before I leave this area of human development and that is the field of Arts and Crafts. Indian Arts and Crafts are important because of the dollar income they bring to people who would otherwise have little earning power. They are important because of the respect that well-made handicrafts generate in the minds of non-Indians. They are important because pride in culture is a need of every people, and that which is distinctively Indian in design, in form, and in materials, has a meaning over and above the dollar sign that can be placed on it.

I am happy to report to you that the old boarding school at Santa Fe will be reconstituted as a high school and post high school training institution specializing in Indian Arts and Crafts.

We ought to place a high value on Indian Arts and Crafts because they make up a distinctive feature of

the American cultural landscape.

One year ago, John F. Kennedy, then a candidate for the President of the United States, addressed a message to this body thru its President, Clarence Wesley. He said, "I am pledged to a program for the development of the human and natural resources of the Indian Reservations".

With the creation of the Task Force and the publication of its report; with the increased ceiling on the revolving loan fund and the adult vocational training programs; and with the start towards a public housing program for the Indian country, we have indeed begun to move.

But it is only beginning and we have a long way to go.

I come to you today as President Kennedy's Commissioner of Indian Affairs. I am committed to his goals, to his ideals, to his programs. My pledge to you is this:

A New Trail stretches out ahead of us. The end is the President’s goal of human and resource development. The chart by which we reach this goal is the Task Force Report to Secretary Udall. As Commissioner, I know that to walk this New Trail successfully, you and I must walk it together. That we will do.