Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: July 12, 1961
Print PDF

A "new trail" for Indians leading to equal citizenship, maximum self-sufficiency, and full participation in American life was endorsed today by Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall.

Secretary Udall endorsed the "new trail" approach in announcing the completion of a 77-page report by a Task Force on Indian Affairs which he appointed earlier in February.

"Preparing the new trail will require the collaboration of the Indians, State and local governments, and the American people," Secretary Udall said.

"We plan to place emphasis on Indian development rather than on termination in the belief that this approach will win the cooperative response from our Indian citizens which is the keystone of a successful program," he said.

The Task Force report which Secretary Udall released today states that "placing greater emphasis on termination than on Indian development impairs Indian morale and produces a hostile or apathetic response which greatly limits the effectiveness of the Federal Indian program."

The report cites, however, the beneficial nature of Federal programs which treat Indians and other Americans the same, such as the Social Security Act, the Area Redevelopment Act, and Public Laws 815 and 874 of the 81st Congress, which provide Federal aid to public school districts in federally-impacted areas.

The Task Force report also urges that eligibility for special Federal service be withdrawn from "Indians with substantial incomes and superior educational experience, who are as competent as most non-Indians to look after their own affairs."

Calling attention to the serious shortage of employment opportunities for Indians, the report recommends development of Indian-owned resources, more vigorous efforts to attract industries to reservation areas, and an expanded program of vocational training and placement. It also calls for the creation of a special Reservation Development loan Fund and expansion of the present Revolving Loan Fund maintained by "The Bureau of Indian Affairs".

The Task Force notes that in some areas, reservation development is complicated by the fact that Indian land allotments have many owners who either cannot be located or will not agree on how the property is to be used. It recommends transferring these fractionated holdings to the tribe and permitting the latter to compensate the owners through some system of deferred payment. In cases where such lands can produce income through timber leasing, the Task Force recommends that the Secretary of the Interior seek authority from Congress to negotiate leases and distribute the proceeds among the Indian owners, without having first to obtain their consent.

The report emphasizes the need for securing the aid of Indian communities in connection with reservation development and comments that "Indians can retain their tribal identities and much of their culture while working toward a greater adjustment."

“lt is in our best interest to encourage them to do so," the report adds.

The Task Force asks the Federal Government to accelerate its negotiations with States and counties, and resort to the courts where necessary, to make certain that off-reservation Indians are accorded the same rights and privileges as other citizens of their areas. With respect to the complex problem of legal jurisdiction over reservation Indians, the Task Force recommends negotiation among the states, the Indians and the Federal Government to make certain that the interests of all are protected. It advocates piecemeal, rather than total, transfer of jurisdiction to the States and comments that such transfer might be effected immediately in such areas as juvenile affairs, institutional commitments and domestic relations.

The report urges the Bureau to work with the States and the tribes toward the end of bringing tribal law and order codes into conformity with those of the various States and counties in which reservations are located. However, it calls attention to the serious differences which exist between Indians and a number of States over such matters as water rights and hunting and fishing rights. These, the report says, must be adjudicated before a complete transfer of law and order responsibility is feasible.

Citing the continuing need for more classroom space for Indian children, the Task Force recommends that consideration be given to keeping schools in operation the year round. Also suggested is the use of school facilities for summertime programs which will help Indian youngsters make constructive use of their leisure time.

As a step toward transferring the responsibility for Indian education to local school districts, the report urges the renovation of present buildings, the construction of new school plants, and improvements in reservation roads so that children can be bussed to school, rather than housed in dormitories. "The Bureau must make a greater effort to involve Indian parents in school planning,” the report continues, “and wherever parent-teacher groups have not been formed, they should be established as rapidly as possible."

The Task Force places great emphasis on the public relations responsibilities of the Bureau. These are described as crucial for informing the general public of the role it must play in Indian development. Field personnel of the Bureau are encouraged to create opportunities for discussing their programs with non-Indians in .the areas where they work, and the Bureau Information Office is urged to build up a reservoir of materials which depict "the modern Indian, the history and present status of his problems, and the programs which the Federal Government and other agencies have instituted in his behalf."

The Department is asked to consider requesting Congress for a statute authorizing the creation of an Advisory Board on Indian Affairs to include persons conversant with Indian problems and interested in finding solutions for them. Members of the board would be appointed by the Secretary of the Interior and would serve him directly.

Included in the Task Force report are a number of suggestions for the reorganization of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Among these, is listed the need for establishing a Division of Economic Development, which would be concerned with resource surveys, tribal enterprises, attracting industry to Indian country, and the promotion of tourism on Indian reservations. Also recommended is the maximum delegation of authority from Washington to the area offices and the superintendencies.

The Task Force urges the Bureau of Indian Affairs to work with the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to develop eligibility criteria which will be consistent for the programs of both agencies. It

suggests that those Indians who can afford to pay for health services be required to do so, and calls upon the Secretary of the Interior to lend his support to H.E.W.'s request for an increased appropriation to provide water and sewage disposal systems on Indian reservations.

The Chairman of the Indian Affairs Task Force is W. W. Keeler of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, who is the Executive Vice-President of the Phillips Petroleum Company and Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation. Other members are Philleo Nash, former Lieutenant Governor of Wisconsin; William Zimmerman, Jr., former Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs; and James E. Officer, University of Arizona anthropologist. Acting Commissioner John O. Crow consulted with the Task Force and accompanied it on field trips.

The group began its study in late February. In the succeeding months, it traveled throughout Indian country conferring with tribal leaders, and held discussions in Washington with representatives of Indian organizations, personnel from the Department, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other Government agencies, and with members of Congress.