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Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
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To have the opportunity to address the group that represents so many of America's first citizens is indeed an honor for the Secretary of the Interior.

It is good to have the opportunity to get away from Washington, D. C. and out in the land, with you - America's first citizens. It is good to join you in celebrating this 25th anniversary of the NCAI.

Through your organization, America's Indians, individually and collectively have made great strides, unfortunately, the NCAI and all of the other Indian groups, for too long have been trying to carve out their niche alone.

Government, in my judgment, has not met its responsibilities in helping you to secure your goals. In this respect, and before I go any further, I want to make one thing crystal clear: This Administration is dedicated to improving -- not destroying -- that special relationship that exists between Government, the Indians, and the land.

We are not a pro-termination Administration. Several weeks ago, I was quoted in the press to the effect that "Hickel is for termination." Let me set the record straight here this afternoon so that there will not be any further misunderstanding. Neither I, nor this Administration, have a pro-termination policy.

Such a policy can only be established by the Indian community itself, through a clear mandate on the part of your people.

Another way of putting it is that I personally, as Secretary of the Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which is under my jurisdiction, do not intend to tell you what to do. Rather, we will listen to you, work with you, and implement the policies which, through mutual understanding, will be designed to further improve your state in life.

I also want you to know that President Nixon agrees with me completely in this line of policy thinking. He put it so well when he said that he will "help the Indian people reach the set goals that they themselves have set and will set."

Not all the publicity surrounding the Secretary's job has been the most favorable as we build this new Administration.

One cartoon I saw showed one Indian saying to another: "If you liked Custer, you'll love Hickel." I hope that such cartoons will soon read: "If you like Indians, you'll love Hickel."

I have searched long and hard to find the right man to represent all of America's Indians as Commissioner of Indian Affairs. In some areas, this delay has caused a rightful concern.

Happily, out of our search, and with your help -- came Louis R. Bruce. He is a man many of you know and have worked with as a founder of this National Congress of American Indians.

And I want to tell all of you that Commissioner. Bruce has my support and my ear.

I have told the Commissioner that I will insist that the American Indians have an important place in determining and making Indian policy, and implement Indian programs.

There will be no plans concerning Indians without having Indians in the planning. There will be no programs for Indians without Indians running the program.

I believed in Indian participation while I was Governor of Alaska, and I had many Indians on the staff in my Administration.

All American Indians can be assured that I have lost none of my beliefs. I know that you have the ability and I intend to utilize your talents.

Let me issue you an invitation to work with us, to begin to take action now for a rewarding future.

In our planning, I have taken two steps. First, I have announced the establishment of an Advisory Committee made up of your chosen representatives and Interior Department representatives.

Second, I have named Morris Thompson, an Alaskan Indian (who is sitting right here), as my Special Advisor on Indian Affairs in Washington. He will remain here in Albuquerque this week and will be available to meet with you.

Only you know who your best spokesmen are. Tell Morris who they are. And tell him what items the Committee should face up to.

When he returns to Washington, Morris, Commissioner Bruce, Assistant Secretary Harrison Loesch and I will sit down and set up a meeting of the Advisory Committee.

We want this first meeting to be soon. And at each meeting we want your chosen representatives telling me the policies you want implemented.

We will also be in constant touch with the Vice President's Council on Indian Opportunity so our programs will be coordinated. I know that Vice President Agnew's aid will be invaluable.

There must be no conflicts with individuals or agencies, no interests greater to Interior than improving the quality of life for the American Indian.

First, there must be a general rise in the quantity and quality of education, and Indians must participate in that rise.

Indians must direct school boards. Indian parents and tribal leaders should be involved in school affairs.

Indian curriculums must be geared to the needs -- both occupational and cultural -- of the Indian.

And, we should remember that education can be both vocational and academic.

Good education is a community effort. And the school must be part of the community. This is being done at Rough Rock. It can be done elsewhere.

Next, we must make sure that unemployment doesn't start when education ends.

It is time to stop thinking merely of "economic development." Lets start thinking in terms of jobs.

For those reservations that don't want industry, we must make other plans.

Together we can develop plans so that Indians themselves contract to provide services in and around the reservations. We can establish more employment for Indians by having them meet the needs of other Indians.

It is important that we build for the future as well as the present. It is important that we build for pride.

Without quality, as well as quantity, there can be no pride in your home. Without challenge and diversity, there can be no pride. Without pride in your home, it is doomed to a life of neglect and disrepair. We must work together to build that house.

As important as jobs and education and housing are, land and water daily affect each and every one of you. But the needs and problems vary from tribe to tribe and area to area.

As trustee for Indian Tribes, I have a duty to protect and defend your rights against all efforts to diminish or destroy them. I will fulfill that duty.

Many of you know that as your Secretary, I have fought hard to get a generous settlement of the Alaskan land claims.

I have worked for legislation to get surplus government lands for the Indian tribes, with favorable legislative reports from our Department on such projects as Cheyenne River, Fort Berthold Laguna, Pueblo, Standing Rock, and Taos Pueblo.

And I have called a hearing at the request of the Fort Mojave Indians. They will be heard.

There are many other concerns in protecting the Indian land rights. I have been greatly troubled by the threat to Pyramid Lake in Nevada. I had opportunity to see the Lake and to meet with the Pyramid Lake Indians prior a meeting with the Governors of California and Nevada concerning the use of water in this basin.

There has been some misunderstanding of this complex matter, but I want you all to know that I am standing firm on providing sufficient water for the preservation of Pyramid Lake and protecting the rights of the Pyramid Lake Tribe.

I want to thank you for the Pyramid Lake Resolution No. 31 that passed last year's NCAI convention and was sent to me. It helped me adopt my policy.

Let me use this meeting to pledge to you that the American Indian will not be the "Forgotten American" in this Administration.

I worked hard as Governor of Alaska to improve native conditions there, now as your Secretary, I have

the same will to bring full citizenship to
American Indians.

There are many other needs -- needs for all Indians, needs for just one tribe, needs for just one Indian.

The challenge to meet the needs is ours--yours and mine. I gladly accept that challenge and I know that you do, too.

With your ideas and your trust, we can make words come to life.

I can help. But, in the final analysis, the future of the Indians -- America's First Citizens -- must be shaped by the Indians, for the Indians.
