

Unused texts

REMARKS OF VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT HUMPHREY
INDIAN OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

JUNE 5, 1968

We hold the first meeting of the National Council on Indian Opportunity in a state which has seen many other important conferences on Indian affairs -- conferences from which fundamental national policy has been derived.

The key ideas embodied in the Wheeler-Howard Act had their origin in a series of meetings in New Mexico between Pueblo governors and non-Indian supporters, begun more than 45 years ago.

I believe I am correct in saying that your present Alamo Pueblo Council had its beginning in that series.

But our meeting here today differs markedly from the earlier councils of Indians and their non-Indian friends. The others were held at a time when Indians were virtually without hope -- and desperately seeking to protect not only what land remained to them, but their very identity as a people. And the experienced Indian leadership to carry on the struggle was virtually lacking.

Today we meet here not in a spirit of crisis, but with a sense of hope and of cautious optimism.

America is now fully behind its Indian citizens with a solid mandate of support. In the past eight years, and particularly the past four years, a series of new programs have been available to Indians for the first time. And we have seen experienced Indian leaders emerge to take advantage of these programs and, in many cases, themselves administer them for the benefit of the Indian people.

The formation of our Council grows out of the activity of the past four years. It was recommended in the report of a Presidential task force on Indian Affairs convened in 1966. The Executive Order which created it accompanied President Johnson's historic message to Congress on goals and programs for the American Indians of March 6th.

The President's message recognized that while advances have been made in improving the condition of the American Indian, his plight remains a tragedy and disgrace to our nation.

Fifty thousand Indian families lack decent housing.

The rate of Indian unemployment is still 10 times greater than the national average.

Indian children are twice as likely to drop out of school as other American children;

Indian life expectancy average twenty-one years less than that of the non-Indians.

I believe this Council can help -- help our Indian citizens to help themselves.

We have four major areas of responsibility:

First, to encourage Indians without reference to whether they live on trust land or off, to make the fullest possible use of federal programs designed to benefit people in need;

Second, to assure the greatest possible degree of inter-agency cooperation and coordination in carrying out these federal assistance programs -- in other words to create one unified Indian program.

Third, to evaluate the effectiveness of federal Indian programs, and to gauge their impact on the solutions of the problem.

And, finally to suggest means by which our programs can be improved, or to recommend totally new programs.

I want especially to emphasize that our greatest responsibility is to foster independence -- not dependence. It would be tragic if our efforts to find solutions to the enormous needs of our Indian citizens only emeshed them further.

Indians at every level must participate in the planning and in the execution of programs. The principle of self-help and local involvement -- which is basic to our community development effort throughout the nation will be all-important here.

Indian communities and tribal groups more and more must administer the activities which Federal agencies have in the past performed in their behalf. Indian CAP programs and the service contracts between certain tribes and the Bureau of Indian Affairs have established precedents in this area.

Greater Indian participation poses a major and exciting challenge to the Indian leadership. It must mean that narrow tribal interests must be abandoned in favor of representing the broadest spectrum of American Indian opinion and interests.

In this spirit we welcome the six Indian members of our Council not only as full equals, but in many respects, as the senior members.

I believe that our conference here today will mark not only the continuation and improvement of the historic relationship between the Indians and the federal government, but the beginning of a new era of independence for all the Indian citizens of America.

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REMARKS

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INDIAN OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL

ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

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Governor Montoya, I believe I am correct in saying that your present All Pueblo Council had its beginning in that series.

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