



FOR RELEASE

TUESDAY PM's
July 16, 1968
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REMARKS OF VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT H. HUMPHREY
INDIAN OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D. C.
JULY 16, 1968

We meet here today not as Indians and The Government, but as a group of concerned Americans, together seeking a solution to a problem which must now be solved once and for all -- the problem of poverty and inadequate opportunity among our Indian citizens.

And we meet not in a spirit of crisis, but in one of hope and of cautious optimism.

Our nation is now fully behind its Indian citizens with a solid mandate of support. The past eight years -- and particularly the past four years -- have seen the development of a series of new programs available to Indians for the first time. And we have seen vital, competent Indian leadership step forward to help put these programs to work for the benefit of the Indian people.

The formation of our Council is part of this progress. 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 of March 6th to Congress on goals and programs for the American Indians.

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 averages 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 on 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 and initiative -- not dependence. It would be tragic if our efforts to find solutions to the enormous needs of our Indian citizens only emeshed them further in a web of dependency.

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 C.A.P. 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 Indian leadership. It means 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 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.

REMARKS

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