



Recognition must be given to the fact that new authorities are needed in order to broaden opportunities for Indian people to improve their social and economic status.

Nothing is more important, in my estimation, than to accomplish a change in the policies and laws that are inhibiting the fullest development of Indian economic opportunity. This can be accomplished without jeopardy to existing protections now enjoyed by Indian people. I consider it my first obligation to the Indian people that such new legislation be formulated.

The major problems and needs thus far discussed in meetings with tribal representatives tend to fall into these general categories: low educational levels of reservation Indians, and need for expanded opportunities for children and adults to acquire education and training that will enable them to take their rightful place in the total national picture; sub-standard housing, and the need for more assistance in community planning and development; substandard living conditions, stemming from poverty, that need attention from health and sanitation workers; chronic unemployment and the need for greater business development on the reservations; and problems of heirship that create a stranglehold on land development.

The role of the National Congress of American Indians could become larger than it has been. It should become an organization respected throughout the Indian community and throughout the non-Indian community as the unified voice of the Indian people. Its great strength is yet to be reached and yet to be felt. It does not need to mimic anyone in order to attract attention. It needs, above all, to reflect the dignity, wisdom, and endurance that traditionally characterize the Indian people.

This is the time -- later may be too late -- to take a close look at NCAI's present role in Indian affairs and to make whatever changes in policy and procedure are necessary to ensure that its activities will accrue to the maximum benefit of the Indian people. As the voice of the Indian people, together, its force can be mighty. Let it be, then, an organization unified in its purposes, and let its purposes be toward constructive participation in Federal-Indian affairs.

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