

NCAI Director Urges Indians Take Part in Education Plans

John 'Belindo, Executive Director of The National Congress of American Indians, stressed the need for Indian participation in the formulation and evaluation of Indian education programs in testimony December 15 before the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education of the Committee on Labor and Welfare.

The stated purpose of the two-day hearings of the newly-formed special Subcommittee, chaired by Senator Robert F. Kennedy of New York, was to search for answers among the Indians themselves.

Belindo expressed the hope that this kind of open forum will become the accepted method of dealing with other Indian issues of major importance.

He stated that in the past the closed door meetings of the Senate or House Interior and Insular Affairs Committees and various Executive Task Forces have denied the Indian people of any method of persuasion or communication.

"These consensus seekers behind closed doors are exposed to the constant temptation to release only those findings that suit their purposes," he said. "There is no one to keep them honest."

Belindo proposed the establishment of a separate agency—an Office of Indian Education Resources Evaluation—to undertake the systematic evaluation of current Indian education programs.

The agency's most important feature would be its staff of Indian as well as non-Indian professional educators who would regularly assess the results of govern-

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ment programs.

Senator Kennedy noted that a common complaint heard throughout the hearings was that Indians were not allowed to determine their own destiny.

"I take it what we need is a whole change of attitude not just more money for more programs," stated Kennedy.

"The White men came in and made a paternalistic judgment of Indian education, never consulting the Indians. They assuaged their conscience by putting Indian children in boarding

schools."

Asked about the NCAI's feeling on Federal boarding schools for Indian children, Belindo stated that when a child is taken from his home environment he is separated from other educational processes such as interaction with parents, friends, and the community as a whole.

"No one here would like to see their young children put in a school hundreds of miles from home."

Senator Kennedy, father of ten, replied, "Sometimes I'm tempted."