

Indian Opportunity Council Meets with Spiro T. Agnew

The American Indian took his case to Washington, D.C. last month in a meeting with Vice-President Spiro Agnew and seven top department officials.

The meeting held Jan. 26 was the first of the National Council on Indian Opportunity under the Nixon administration.

Member, Willie Hensley of Kotzebue, described the White House session as encouraging and offering great potential for improving the plight of the American Indian.

The committee members sit "eyeball to eyeball with the secretaries of the departments," he said.

"I feel," he continued, "that they are going to take a pretty good look at their programs in reference to the American Indian."

Agnew, himself, said that he would diligently pursue his own responsibility in regard to the national council and wants heavy involvement of the cabinet members, Hensley added.

In addition to six Indian members and Vice President Agnew, the following department officials were at the meeting: Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel, Secretary of Agriculture Clifford M. Hardin, Assistant Secretary of Commerce Robert A. Podesta, Secretary of Labor George P. Shultz, Secretary of HEW Robert H. Finch, Under-Secretary of HUD Richard C. Van Dusen, and Director of OEO Donald Rumsfeld.

During the two and a half hour meeting each of these representatives relayed what their department is currently doing in regard to Indian affairs.

The departments represented at the meeting, other than the Interior, Agnew explained, receive nearly half of the total Federal expenditures of over \$5 billion for Indians.

And the National Council on Indian Opportunity, he said, must provide the guidance for improved coordination among these departments.

"It is my purpose and the purpose of this Council to attack the raw truth and to do so effectively within the term of this administration," the Vice President said.

He then called for recommendations from the Indian members of the council and for a status report from the departments at the end of 30 days on each of the recommendations.

Each department, he continued, is to determine which of proposals it can implement immediately, which can be carried out in the next 5 years, which are feasible but will take time, and which are impossible to put in operation or not in the best interest of anybody.

In their nearly 30 pages of recommendations, the Indian members proposed that an Indian be placed at the policy and planning level in each department and that the Bureau of Indian Affairs have its own assistant secretary of the Interior or that the Commissioner of Indian Affairs be given Assistant Secretary status.

The members further recommended that the administrative structure of the BIA be analyzed—with a view toward elimination of "dead wood."

In the area of education, the Indians proposed that funding for the construction of a vast network of community schools and that the phasing out of BIA boarding schools become a policy goal.

Other recommendations called for the creation of needed services for the urban Indian and the establishment of an agency independent from both the Interior and Justice Departments to represent the tribes in all legal services required in connection with Indian rights to lands, water, and natural resources.

Still other recommendations concerned housing, agriculture, health, welfare, jurisdiction and economic development.

The Indian members of the council also voiced their support for the land settlement proposed by the Alaska Federation of Natives and urged that, in particular, the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture give their full support to the AFN proposal.

The same day of the meeting, Jan. 26, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy spoke before the executive council of the National Congress of American Indians in Washington.

Calling the Indian America's first conservationist, he cautioned them against losing further land or water rights under the guise of conservation.

"But," he added, "you must not lose sight of the conservationist objectives in your own desires to maximize development on your reservations."

The Massachusetts Senator cited several examples where land or water rights have been or are being taken away from Indians and warned, "Without vigilant protection of your rights, you will find yourselves heading, in fact if not in law, toward termination of your very existence."

To protect his rights, the Indian must have knowledge of what he owns and the extent of his rights in his property, he added.

"I think it is time," he concluded, "for you to feel free to turn your efforts to resource protection and economic and human resource development."