

NCAI ASKS INDIAN HEADS BIA

National Organization Suggests Pres. Nixon Appoint Wendell Chino

In a letter to President Nixon, released to the press July 3, John Belindo, Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) called for the immediate appointment of an Indian as Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

Belindo pointed out that "the longer your Administration fails to act on this matter, the more difficult will be the task for the incoming Commissioner to maintain any continuity with favorable programs and policies of Commissioner Bennett, who had the support of the Indian people."

Bennett, first American Indian to hold the position in recent times, resigned under Administration pressure on May 31, 1969. Since then, the office has been filled by an Acting Commissioner.

"For five months we have waited in vain, as one qualified Indian applicant after another has been interviewed, some perfunctorily, and then rejected," Belindo, a Kiowa-Navajo, said.

Expressing the fear that the parade of rejected Indian applicants is "a show in prelude to the appointment of a non-Indian Commissioner," Belindo asserted that the Indian community would universally regard such an appointment as a big step backwards.

Commissioner Robert L. Bennett of the Indian Affairs resigned his post. He was the first Indian (Oneida) to serve in that capacity in a hundred years.

Bennett charged that the Nixon administration has been indifferent to the Indian people. He said that the President and his advisors "have completely ignored the Indians up to now."

Before being appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Bennett served for several years as the Area Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Alaska.

Naming Alonzo Spang, a Northern Cheyenne who is serving as Vice President of Navajo Community College, and Rev. Wendell Chino, Mescalero Apache who is National President of NCAI, as among the well-qualified Indian applicants, Belindo said, "We believe, in addition, that among those who have been interviewed, there are others well-qualified to hold this office."

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Belindo called for the appearance of the nominee before NCAI and other Indian groups, to make his programs known in an open discussion with the Indian people, prior to confirmation.

"We firmly believe that further delay is unwarranted, and will be disastrous to the implementation of any kind of a meaningful program." Belindo said.

NCAI is a national, Indian-directed organization, including in its membership 105 tribes, representing 350,000 American Indians.

John Belindo's letter is printed in its entirety on page 2.