

"America Needs To Know"

Indian Panel Urges Press to Cover Resource, Trust Issues

by Cynthia Stowell

Consciousness-raising by a panel of Indian advocates at the Associated Press Managing Editors' convention in Portland September 28 was given immediate fuel when the assembly adjourned to Timberline Lodge for Indian dancing and a salmon bake staged by the Warm Springs Tribes.

The special Indian Day for visiting pressmen combined challenges for better coverage with relaxed social interaction, and as one Massachusetts editor remarked, "Today has gone a long way toward improving relations."

Panel moods ranged from Navajo Tribal Chairman Peter McDonald's friendly suggestions to "American for Indian Opportunity" head LaDonna Harris' frustrated pleas for understanding. Senator James Abourezk (D-S.D.) and Assistant Secretary of the Interior Forrest Gerard found themselves at odds on specific Indian issues but agreed that journalists have inadequately addressed Indian affairs, dwelling on the sensational or controversial.

Assembled by editor Larry Fuller of the Argus-Leader in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, the panel brought a diversity of opinions and styles together to "increase the awareness" of convening editors and encouraged them to "look at Indian problems in a more serious way." And as Fuller told the gathering, "As you enjoy the hospitality of the Warm Springs Confederation this afternoon perhaps we can also be thinking of ways we can build better understanding."

At Timberline Lodge editors were exposed to Nelson Wallulatum's Wasco dance tradition, Nathan Jim's powwow dancing, salmon baking and the erecting of a tepee. The outing also proved to be a rare opportunity for many of the editors to discuss Indian affairs and issues one-to-one with tribal representatives.

Panel members' remarks earlier in the day focused on the critical need for in-depth coverage of Indians' resource rights and the government's fulfillment of its trust responsibility.

On resource conflicts McDonald commented, "We are an available scapegoat for a nation

that needs land, water, uranium, coal, oil, tourism, fishing, urban growth, industrial expansion. We try to claim what little is ours, what little is left us. We are likely to be viewed as evil and selfish people . . . To make us the target is to pretend that if it were not for the Indians, America could still have unlimited growth, land, energy and resources. If you took everything we had, you would still face the same problems, the same limits, the same hard choices."

LaDonna Harris noted that "when we were quaint tourist attractions" people found Indians to be acceptable. But now "we want to be a part of the economy," and the pursuit of fishing rights and claims to water are viewed as threatening.

Appealing to the press, McDonald said, "We ask you to find ways to help people understand that when Navajos and other Native Americans reach for self-sufficiency — political, economic and governmental self-sufficiency — we are not declaring war on the American people."

Senator Abourezk, whose history of Indian advocacy in Congress started in the drama of Wounded Knee, continued through the American Indian Policy Review Commission, and will end this year when he leaves Congress and the chair of the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, criticized bitterly the bureaucracy that is entrusted with Indian affairs — the B.I.A.

He said in reference to media treatment, "The reality is that press coverage of government mismanagement of Indian affairs is at best skimpy and at worst non-existent, which enables the Indian bureaucracy to commit the crimes against humanity which they have gotten away with over the past several decades." Abourezk described these "crimes" as medical experimentation, removal of Indian children to boarding schools, and the relocation of adults to urban areas.

Abourezk, who earlier this year asked for the resignation of B.I.A. head Gerard, labeled the current B.I.A. policy "survival management — survival not of the Indian people but of the bureaucracy itself."



PANEL TO PRESS - B.I.A. head Forrest Gerard addressed the Associated Press Managing Editors Convention, asking them to be aware of the issues behind controversies. Also on the panel were Navajo Chairman Peter McDonald, LaDonna Harris of the Americans for Indian Opportunity, and Senator James Abourezk of South Dakota. CDS Photo

Gerard responded that the problems of the B.I.A. "should be laid at the feet of other institutions of government — the White House, top leadership, the Department of Interior as well as previous directors of the Bureau of Indian Affairs."

To which Abourezk rebounded, "Forrest Gerard can sit there and say 'Well, Congress ought to change this stuff' and yet he and the bureaucrats with him are responsible for preventing that change."

What the Assistant Secretary later called the "Abourezk-Gerard Show," referring to yet another episode in their long-standing difference in style and approach, McDonald used as an illustration for his points.

"As you can see, this could go on all day," the chairman of the 150,000-member Navajo Tribe remarked. "The Senator says 'the B.I.A. and Interior'. B.I.A. and Interior says it's Congress. And if you bring both of them together they say it's the Indians."

"That is why I say there has to be much understanding by you," he told the collected editors.

All panel members seemed to agree that the media tend to cover only crisis situations be-

cause they lack the necessary legal, historical and cultural background in Indian affairs to provide in-depth, ongoing coverage. As Gerard said, "reporters often have a tendency to underestimate the importance of the developing story" and "controversy becomes the only apparent available story."

Recognizing the complexity of Indian issues, the panel members encouraged editors and reporters to spend time trying to grasp such concepts as the dual role tribes play as dependent but sovereign nations. Said Gerard, "I doubt if there are many in the audience who realize that these governments . . . carry on many dynamic and innovative endea-

vors."

One question from the floor spoke to difficulties encountered by newspaper staffs in attempted coverage of local tribal affairs, to which Gerard responded, "It's a matter of people meeting on common ground."

Another editor challenged the panel to encourage more Indians to enter the field of journalism.

McDonald, who was received warmly by the newspapermen, couched his criticism in respect for the press and left the gathering with this message and challenge:

"You are trustees of the conscience of America — and America needs to know."

1979 Tribal Budget Posted

Tribal Council approved the 1979 budget for the Confederated Tribes October 2 and posted it for thirty days of public inspection, thus ending their month-long review.

It has been eight months since the budget process began with the development of department, branch, and tribal objectives. Tribal Council Resolution No. 5314 formally attached figures to those objectives.

A general council will be held in November for the presentation and discussion of the budget.

Total projected revenue for the coming year is \$19,873,430 which is approximately \$6 million more than the income projected for 1978. The Tribes are exceeding income expectations this year, however, mainly due to the unexpected right-of-way agreement made with Bonneville Power Authority.

The budget, which came out of council looking somewhat different than when it went in, shows an outlay of \$10,218,193 for program expenses. This is a 23 per cent increase over 1978 when \$7,864,351 were budgeted for expenditures. Management had proposed a 28 per cent increase. Deleted, added or held up

Tribal Council reduced the total proposed budget by \$79,344 in the process of deleting and adding select program expenses. Council is also holding funds for at least 15 positions and pro-

grams for further review.

Management was involved in all council budget sessions with the exception of one executive session, so the changes were not met with surprise.

In the Health Branch, the Community Health Educator and Wilderness Program were axed, while the Health Planner's budget was cut in half. The Jackson Home residential child care program was put on hold.

Several positions in the Municipal Branch have been eliminated, including the recently-acquired assistant police chief, as well as the juvenile officer. In officer and juvenile officer. In fact the whole juvenile justice program is being questioned by the Council and will be scrutinized for progress and accomplishments. Four of the positions in the police department are in need of justification and review, including two patrolmen, one dispatcher and one Kah-Nee-Ta security position. A merit increase for the police chief was also denied.

The Natural Resources Department and Police Department are gaining a surveillance airplane to enhance enforcement. One range rider, two radios and a vehicle have also been added to Natural Resources.

The Community Center had \$10,000 lopped off its budget because of under-expenditure in 1978. The difference in the male

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STORYTELLER - Navajo Tribal Chairman Peter McDonald mesmerized press people from Florida when managing editors and Indian representatives gathered at Timberline Lodge September 28. A panel of Indian advocates advised AP editors of their concerns earlier in the day. CDS Photo