

Watt featured speaker at 39th NCAI convention

by Sid Miller

Bismarck, North Dakota was the setting for the 39th annual National Congress of American Indian convention held September 26, through October 1.

It was like a hunters paradise. All arrows pointed toward the feature speaker, James Watt, following his address. Some arrows had quite a sting since, after his speech, delegates didn't have a chance to question him about Indian matters and problems the Indians face today.

It was a gathering of all tribal leaders and representatives from throughout the country and Alaska, all uniting in full force to discuss critical issues that pose threats to Indian country today.

The Secretary of the Interior, Watt, delivered the feature address to some 1,500 Indian leaders on Monday the 27th. He focused on issues of trust responsibility, the B.I.A. realignment, Indian education, water rights and the ten percent timber fee, as well as other critical issues that may not seem important to some, but should never be overlooked.

Being a native of Wyoming, Watt said he had never encountered Indian problems until he was appointed Secretary of the Interior. He did say in his opening remarks

that the President is very much interested in Indian Affairs and is concerned with all the problems Indian Tribes are facing today.

Since, Watt has visited several Indian reservations and after being with Indians and Alaskan natives, he has seen what all Indians want is what all Americans want, he said. "A chance to be self-sufficient. A chance to choose a life-style. A chance to provide for family and children. A chance to live in dignity."

"For the ten percent timber fees, it will be handled in its present form through fiscal year 1983. In the preparation of the President's budget for fiscal year 1984, the entire cost of the Indian forestry program will be displayed and presented to Congress."

Water issues are vitally important to the reservations, especially in the west. A major effort is being made to negotiate settlement of more than 50 Indian water right cases. "By settling these issues, we can improve planning for the future in both the Indian and non-Indian communities," Watt said.

"In education, we are making necessary consolidations because of mandatory cutbacks in federal funding

and because we believe that our education program must be improved."

The B.I.A. is spending more than one-quarter of a billion dollars on Indian education programs, more than one-third of their total budget.

"Finally, during my recent visit to Alaska, I reconfirmed the commitment of this administration to enforce the federal commitment to subsistence rights for Alaska Natives.

"Although our federal government has a special relationship with the Indian tribes and native organizations, and I have some special trust responsibilities, I believe that the future lies, not in what the federal government does for you, but in what you do for yourselves.

"It is time for real solutions to problems rather than short term, stop-gap solutions."

In conclusion Watt said, "You are rich in human and natural resources which your nation and the world will need—resources which we feel each of you should be allowed and encouraged to develop as you see fit.

"It will come because that spirit that led the first Americans to this continent, that spirit which enabled Indians to overcome great obstacles, still lives deep within our people."

At the conclusion of his address, tribal leaders were eager to present their problems to the Secretary but, because of a tight schedule and only a short time to catch his plane, Watt was unable to hear their questions.

Mr. McBride of the Sioux Tribe squeezed in a question on the use of water in South



James Watt

Dakota for a pipeline and just what the Indian rights were.

Watt said that South Dakota had some water rights according to the paperwork. A final allocation of water rights should be made so everyone knows where they stand, he

said. Right now there is a need for that water, which is a drop in a tea cup, but is a precedent that could grow if we don't sit down and make those allocations. "That, again, we should negotiate and not litigate," Watt stressed.



Ken Smith

News Miss NCAI selected

Linda Baker, Southern Ute of Ignacio, Colorado, was crowned Miss NCAI for 1982-83 at the pageant held September 30 during the annual NCAI convention at Bismarck, North Dakota.

Miss Baker was chosen from a field of 20 girls representing tribes from throughout the continental U.S. and Alaska.

Her successful bid for the crown was attributed to her outstanding talent which was the Ute creation story in sign language. She gained additional points for beauty and poise.

Miss Baker will carry quite a load during her reign as Miss NCAI for the coming year. Miss NCAI has a busy schedule all year long which includes a lot of traveling.

Regina Ruth Christies, Cherokee from Tahlequa, Oklahoma was first runner-up. Her talent was piano solo and singing.

Leela Shegonee, Praire Band Patawatom from Stevens Point, Wisconsin was the second runner-up.

Rose Abraham, Yupik Eskimo of Cook Inlet, Alaska was named Miss Congeniality.

The whole group of girls was great and it appeared to be a tough decision for the judges to choose the winners.



Miss NCAI Linda Baker—Southern Ute

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