

Sovereignty, tribal rights, state of NCAI discussed at 48th annual convention in San Francisco



Warm Springs delegates crowded into the meeting room where the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians was conducting their caucus. ATNI is said to be one of the largest and most powerful caucuses in the United States.

by Donna Behrend

Hundreds of tribal leaders from throughout the United States converged on San Francisco for the six-day annual meeting of the National Congress of American Indians. Conferees not only heard issues faced by fellow tribesmen, but elected a new executive committee as well at the 48th annual meeting.

The President's Message

In his opening statement, executive president Wayne Ducheneaux reflected on his two-year term that was quickly coming to a close. "In two years, the organization has come a long way." At the beginning of his term in 1989, NCAI "was close to bankruptcy" and ready to close its doors. With the help of many volunteer workers during the first several months, NCAI was able to turn the corner to prosperity. Ducheneaux advised that people "not dwell in the past. Look toward the future. We should be poised to sail smoothly into the 21st century."

The Director's Message

Executive Director A. Gay Kingman echoed Ducheneaux's comments, adding that "we reduced operating costs and completed the audit with money in the bank. Our credibility has been restored...In 1989, every contract was in default. All those problems have been turned around...NCAI is being delivered to you in good shade. Take care of her."

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Risling

Dale Risling, chairman of the Hoopa Tribal Nation of Northern California, welcomed the attendees, stating that "California is a state of contrasts. We live in the largest state in the nation and we have many problems. We produce more food, yet the hungry and homeless are still on the streets. We are a progressive state yet our tribal sovereignty is constantly threatened." Reservations are considered to be "easy hunting grounds" for those who challenge tribal sovereignty. In the past, he said, tribes have fought to maintain their sovereignty. The fight continues and will for many years. "The future looks bright for Indian throughout the United States. The 'New Federalism' is not just another slogan

buried in bureaucracy—it means more self-government...We must show the nation that we can establish and maintain solid governments."

The Senator Speaks

Senator Daniel Inouye, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, spoke about sovereignty as well as the quinquennial of Columbus' "discovery" of North America. "In ten-and-one-half months, many will observe the journey of Columbus. Indians will not join in the celebration. For Indians, it was an age of deceit, death, destruction, deprivation and denial. It was not a happy age."



Senator Daniel Inouye

However, Inouye added, "there is cause for Indians to celebrate. It is the beginning of rediscovery. Rediscover the honor within each of you. Rediscover your power. We did this in the Duro case and the capital punishment issue. This is an age of resurgence."

Inouye asked the tribe to "tell us how tribal sovereignty is to be discussed...Train us on your legal system." A three-year study on sovereignty will begin next year, Inouye said. "We want to hear from you on how we can study sovereignty." Inouye reiterated that "people often don't realize how much power they have within themselves. You have a lot of power. If used properly, miracles can happen."

"Certain things have to be done," said Inouye. "First, learn how to tell your story. The American Indian Museum will tell one thing—the glory and grandeur of Indians." But, Inouye feels there's more to the story. He reminded the group of Indian participation in all American wars since the American Revolution. "Indian

participation has been greater proportionately than any other ethnic group...I think it's about time that Indians begin tooting their own horns. You have something to brag about—tell your story."

Unity among Indian tribes is important. A united front gets things done, such as in the Duro case, in which Indian tribes lobbied Congress to enact a law to overturn a Supreme Court decision which removed tribes' law enforcement authority over non-member Indians. "Whenever I see division among Native American people, I get sad. Non-Indians are probably pleased with the division among the ranks." Inouye asked that the tribes support the federal recognition of the West Virginia Lumbee Indian tribe. Federal recognition of the Lumbee tribe, to some, said Inouye, means "cutting a small pie into even smaller parts. This opposition is not based on principal or fact, but on materialism."

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Inouye

Inouye also asked for tribal support of the Gaming Regulatory Act. Tribes and states must each "recognize and respect the other's sovereignty and authority." Tribal governments must abide by the terms of the law, much like they expect state governments to do...If Indian country doesn't do this, there are many on the sidelines who are eager to make sure you do."

The Secretary's Message

Manual Lujan, Secretary of the Interior, stated it is a "mutual goal to strengthen the government-to-government bond. The President's commitment runs throughout the Department of the Interior...We are trying to make the bureau programs the best they can be."

"Total commitment on everyone's part" is necessary for the success of education. "Tribes are taking a very good interest in education...Our children must be educated."

Of self-determination, Lujan said that 16 tribes are involved in self-governance demonstration projects. Seven of those are in their second year. We're working with other tribes to help them assume responsibility of their own programs." Also related to self-determination is the BIA re-organization task force. Lujan said

that 36 tribal leaders, chosen by their tribes, are working with seven Interior people to help design the restructuring of the BIA. "We're striving to develop programs that will best serve the needs of tribal governments...This is the first time tribes have been given the opportunity to help restructure the BIA."

On Legal Issues

Larry Echohawk, of the Native American Rights Fund, spoke about the importance of asserting tribal sovereignty and looking to "Congress to solve the problems created by the Supreme Court," such as in the Duro case. "Tribal courts are capable of handling cases involving non-member Indians."

Elbridge Coochise, president of the National Indian Court Judges Association, stated that sovereignty must not be taken for granted. "Some tribal sovereignty has been restored and recognized by Congress. We can't continue to say we're sovereign and do nothing." Tribal courts are the arena in which sovereignty is established. "It's up to tribes to improve the judicial systems under which we work...There is room for improvement. If we don't have resources to operate, we can't exercise our sovereignty and operate fully."

If tribes are careless, "people will have to look somewhere else for their day in court, because they won't have it at home."

Coochise

Tribes are continually faced with opposition. "Processes are still in place to diminish tribal sovereignty." If those efforts are successful, tribal courts may no longer exist. "People will have to look somewhere else for their day in court because they won't have it at home." Coochise asked for support of the Courts Enhancement Bill (S 7152) that would beef up court systems. "Tribal courts need help," he said.

Nuclear Waste

Russell Jim, a Yakima tribal member and part of the NCAI National Indian Energy Advisory board, was one of many to talk about nuclear and hazardous waste. The Yakima Reservation is relatively close ("20 miles as the crow flies") to the Hanford Nuclear Reactor site where thousands of tons of nuclear waste are stored. He explained that the waste (2,100 tons) are stored "less than 300 yards from the Columbia River. The K-reactor in which the waste is stored is built on a geological fault. "If there were an earthquake," the damage would be insurmountable and irre-

versible for decades. "We may continue to degrade those who ruin our lands," said Jim. "But, we must consider the options for the future. One way in which this can be accomplished is to "encourage our youth to study the sciences because they may be able to deal with the waste." Jim said that many people don't understand what tribes have gone through in relationship to waste. "I hope the logic of the uninformed will go away."

"Seventy-five percent of nuclear waste storage facilities are located on or near Indian reservations," said Jim. Of the 139 single-shelled storage tanks currently in existence, 66 are leaking. Twenty-eight double-shelled tanks have been constructed to store the material leaking from the faulty tanks. "One tank nearly exploded last year. No one was around to tell how to prevent the explosion." People, in general, know very little about nuclear waste.

"Don't condemn those of us who are trying to deal with nuclear waste. It's not our fault or your fault. But if you don't deal with the issue, whose fault will it be?" asked Jim.

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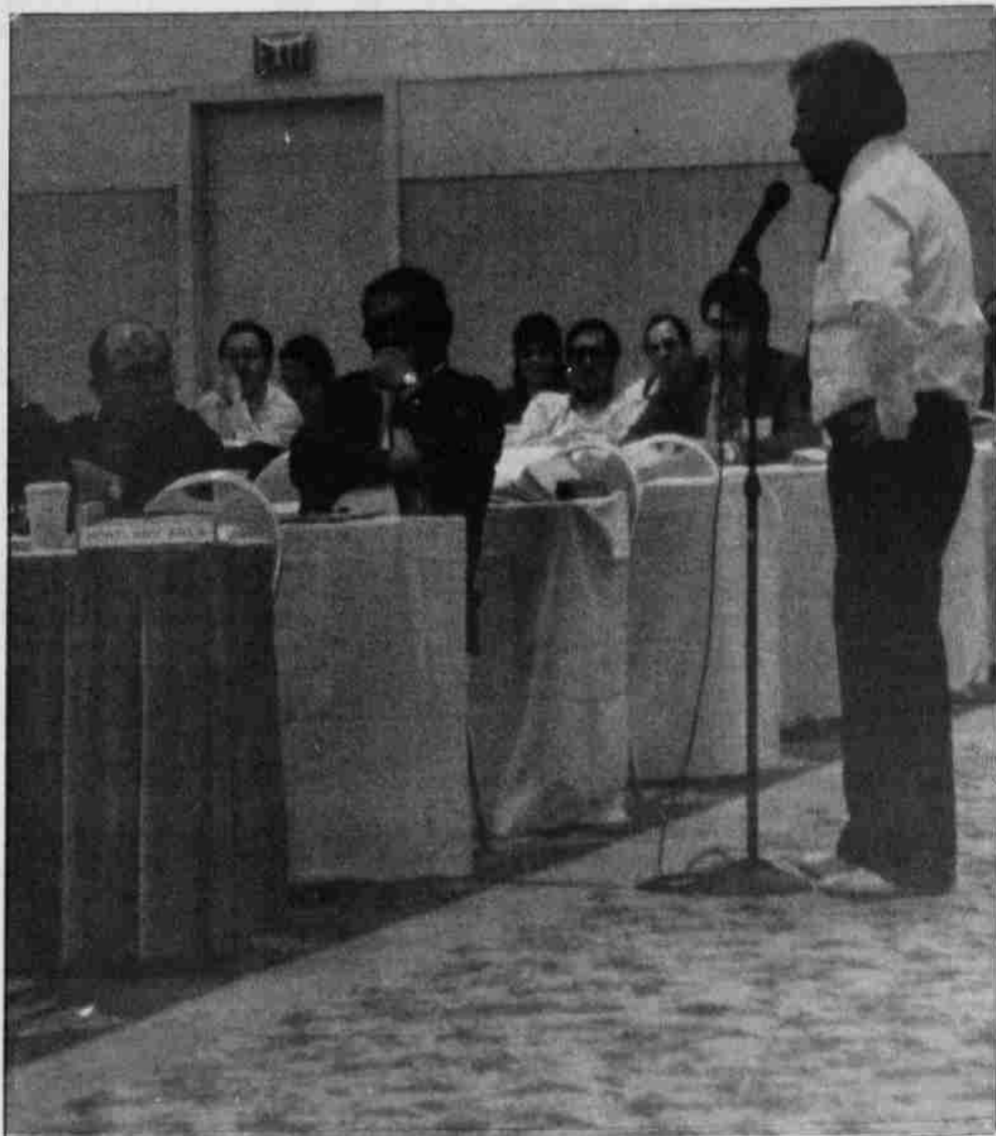
Jim



Russell Jim



Brenda and Gordon Scott and Art and Bernice Mitchell prepare their ballots during the election of officers. The elections, a long and sometimes confusing event, took an entire afternoon.



Warm Springs Tribal Council Chairman Zane Jackson and Vice-Chairman Delbert Frank, Sr. listen to a fellow-delegate relate issues and concerns affecting his reservation. Many such issues were discussed at the 48th annual NCAI convention held in San Francisco December 2 through 6.



New NCAI President Gaiasbkibos

Executive committee members elected

- President:**
Gaiasbkibos
Lac Courte Oreilles
- First Vice-President:**
Joseph Goombi
Kiowa
- Recording Secretary:**
Rachel Joseph
Shoshone-Paiute-Mono
- Treasurer:**
A. Ron Allen
Klallum