

Inouye recalls days when communication with tribes was difficult, time consuming



"The federal government's obligation to Indian tribes is based on treaty and the law of the land," said Senator Daniel Inouye, chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, to delegates attending the annual NCAI convention in Reno, Nevada.

"You have paid your dues many times over. Of the 800 treaties that were signed by tribes and the government, over half were never ratified. Of the ratified treaties, all were violated in some way. Indian warriors have participated in every conflict and war since the Revolutionary War...casualties among Indian people during World War II were higher than any other ethnic

group....It's pay back time." Inouye reflected on the past fifty years of NCAI. "...much has changed in the last fifty years. Most of the changes have come about through the sheer force of your will and determination. Some of that change has been aided by changes in technology....Fifteen years ago, we were forced to rely, almost exclusively, on the postal service to reach you with the news of pending events in Washington. Often, it took four to six weeks for the mail to reach you. And even if you responded immediately, it took another three to four weeks before we received your guidance and direction.

"Often, we could not move to the beat of your drums—we could not hear your voices—in a timely fashion—and so, well-intentioned people did what they thought you might want them to do. Too often, we made mistakes because we did not have the benefit of your thoughts and your experience.

"We could not see the world through your eyes, and so we could not understand the conditions which you faced, nor could we divine the solutions to problems that were unique to Indian Country.

Over the years, "...you have paid your dues many times over....It's payback time." Daniel Inouye

Washington was a long way from Indian Country—...Though your numbers may be small in comparison to the overall population of this country, you have found the means of making your voices heard. You have taken a momentous step in deciding that it is you who will exercise dominion and

control over your future and the future of your children and grandchildren. "The nation's capitol is no longer a distant realm. Rather, it is a place where you—the Native people—are recognized and welcome. You have assumed an important position in the corridors of power in this country. This you achieved through your own determination. The technology of telephones and televisions, computers and telefax machines came along to enable you to

"Washington...is a place where you are recognized and welcome....you are a force to be reckoned with. Your role, on any issue....is an important one." Daniel Inouye

have instantaneous communication. "You have become, as you were in the early days of this country, a force to be reckoned with. Your role in the national debate on any issue of the day is an important role. No one takes you for granted. The challenge of your next fifty years as a national voice for Native people and the path you will take can only be determined by each of you here and all of those whom you represent. Because, no longer will a national organization—any organization—have to speak for you. Instantaneous communication capabilities enable every tribal government and every reservation community to be heard.

"Lawmakers no longer turn to a national organization and confine themselves to whatever answers they receive from such organizations, to attempt to know and understand what is happening in Indian Country.

"The committee, for instance,

regularly sends out letters by mail or telefax, to every tribal government. We ask what you want us to do...and our answers come directly from tribal governments and directly from tribal leaders. Thus, to me, it seems that the challenge of this organization in the days to come, will be to adapt the National Congress of American Indians to these changing times in which we live."

In conclusion, Inouye stated, "As

NCAI begins its fifty-first year, I will begin my eighth year as a member of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs....I have learned not only history but the art of survival as a member of the committee." Inouye explained the meaning of a native word, ohama, which means family. "This is not limited to blood relatives. But also refers to a family of people we hold dear. To me, you are ohama."



Miss Warm Springs, Merle Anne Kirk, competed in the Miss NCAI Pageant while in Reno. Merle took the Miss Congeniality title. She performed traditional talent, using cultural items, and sang a song.

NCAI president excited about challenges of future, changes to improve organization

NCAI president reflects on past, looks to future, and challenges facing Indian people across the nation

Chairman of the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, gaiashkibos, also serves as president of NCAI. His bid for re-election at this year's convention was successful and the next two years, much like the past two years, will be full of challenges. Following is part of gaiashkibos' statement to delegates at this year's convention.

"...The struggle of our people over the past centuries has been one against seemingly insurmountable odds...truly a battle against genocide. We have lost whole nations, our culture, our languages, our religion, is still under attack. We have seen our mother earth torn up and disrespected, first by explorations, then by westward expansion and finally by industrialization. We have been removed from our homelands to reservations, separated from our families, and on far too many occasions, forced to live in strange and hostile environments. The approach may have changed, but the battle for our cultural survival continues, as the many small and non-federally recognized tribes can attest to—many are taking their last breath in their quest for survival. And we continue to move forward together again and again. I am sure that those who have gone before us...are proud. Just as I am sure those individuals who gathered in Denver some 50 years ago are proud to see that their dream of a national voice for our people has come true

in a most powerful and moving way. We truly have come together, here in Reno, from the four sacred directions and together, we will lead to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow."

gaiashkibos spoke of the meeting between the Clinton/Gore transition team and tribal leaders in Albuquerque, New Mexico last fall. To gaiashkibos, that meeting was "one of the most significant exercises of sovereign authority of tribal nations in recent history.... We presented to the transition team our legislative priorities which included economic development initiatives, Native American religious freedom issues, the sovereign right of tribes to engage in regulated gaming activities, reorganization of the BIA in a manner which would facilitate effective relationships with the tribes, improved health care for our people and better educational opportunities, among others. We also pursued an affirmation of the federal government's commitment to the government-to-government relationship with American Indians and Alaska Native tribal governments.... We have made gains in many of these areas and are maintaining a meaningful and effective dialogue with the Clinton administration on a regular and on-going basis."

"...tribes have invested over the years into every conceivable economic venture....Gaming tribes are erecting schools, health care facilities, libraries and creating new programs....NCAI supports gaming because we support the sovereign governmental authority of tribal governments....that sovereignty cannot ever be compromised."

gaiashkibos

The NCAI president had the opportunity to testify before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs concerning the Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA). "The JTPA program is good, with many success stories. I stand opposed to any activity that would compromise the integrity of the program and diminish tribal control over the program. It is imperative that we take every opportunity to reiterate that the principles of tribal sovereignty and self-determination are applicable to all agencies of the federal government."

"We have been active this past year in the gaming issue and joined the National Indian Gaming Association to form the NCAI/NIGA task force....Indian tribes nationwide have invested millions of their own dollars over the years into every conceivable economic venture which showed even a little promise to develop their economies. While some have worked, many have failed at great cost to the tribes and the federal government....Gaming tribes are erecting schools, health care facilities, libraries and creating new programs independent of federal assistance. The result has been an expansion of reservation economies

that has never before been experienced. Gaming has positioned many tribes on the edge of economic self-sufficiency. Indian gaming is an important issue to NCAI, not only because of the economic benefits it has brought to Indian country, but also because

"We know....the loss of whole nations to disease....The key is education of our people, particularly our youth..."

gaiashkibos

we support the sovereign governmental authority of tribal governments as confirmed in the Cabazon case...that sovereignty cannot ever be compromised.

"Additional challenges include overcoming the fact that far too many of our people live without adequate housing, are unemployed or underemployed, people are going hungry and too few have access to educational opportunities and too few are receiving proper and adequate health care. We must face the problems squarely and honestly. You know, some of our people...believe that AIDS and the HIV infection have little to do with the lives of American Indians and Alaska Natives. This is dangerous thinking. With each new day, the AIDS and HIV virus is spreading among our people. The rate of infection is increasing among Native people more rapidly than any other group. As leaders, we must become educated about the disease and actively support efforts of prevention and AIDS and HIV education in our communities. We know and understand the loss of whole nations to disease. The key is

NCAI Executive Council Winter Session
February 15, 16, 17, 1994
Double Tree Inn
Crystal City, VA

NCAI Mid Year Session
June 14, 15, 16, 1994
Hyatt Regency
Buffalo, N.Y.

Organization to build better tomorrow

As one of 16 NCAI standing committees, veterans affairs are of major concern among American Indians in the United States. Virtually all tribes have lost members during conflict or war. Often times, however, many Indian veterans are forgotten.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Jesse Brown, spoke to NCAI delegates during the first day of meetings. Brown encouraged organizations "to bring about justice, social adaptation and "hope. All this will build a greater tomorrow."

Brown theorized that the "Veterans Association must remain strong if it is to carry out its obligations to veterans. Our goal is to provide quality services to all vets. We must

put veterans first. Those who risked their lives deserve respect and dignity," he declared. Brown asked "what are we doing to ensure first class service to Native American veterans?" Answering is own question, Brown said, "reservation-based programs. The real winners will be the veterans themselves." He added that many veterans don't take advantage of the veteran services now available.

In closing, Brown said, "We have learned our history lessons well. We have made mistakes. We will not repeat these mistakes. History, despite the pain, cannot be un-lived. But if faced with courage, will not be lived again."

Assistant Secretary... "Time is right for partnership" to fulfill hope



Ada Deer, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, in speaking to delegates, said, "I had the honor of addressing my first NCAI convention 20 years ago. I appealed to you for your support of the Menominee Restoration Act, which reversed the ill fated policy of termination. Later this year, on December 22, my tribe will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the act's successful and historic passage. Your support back then was critical and your support today is critical. Menominee Restoration is a vivid reminder to me that change can occur even against the most intimidating odds."

In talking of upcoming changes in the Secretary's office, Deer said, "I have a few things to report. I have not been asleep at the switch since July, I realize honeymoons are short and sweet so thank you for your patience. Come January, I am pleased to an-

nounce that Faith Roessel will be coming on board initially as a consultant, and upon clearance, as Deputy Assistant Secretary. She currently is Director of the Navajo Nation Washington office and brings a wealth of experience and talent to the tasks before her. I also anticipate having a new director of Economic Development on board come January and soon thereafter a director of Congressional and Legislative Affairs. I am looking into creating a special assistant for Indian Education in my immediate office, for Indian education represents nearly 40 percent of the BIA budget, thus I believe it requires a significant commitment on my part."

Since her appointment in July, Deer has met with over 100 tribal leaders and has traveled extensively. "I said I wanted to meet Indians where they lived and not just in Washington. This travel has convinced me that change has to occur, Indian policy can not be developed in a vacuum. The BIA needs to look at new ways of budgeting, we need to reduce the regulatory process and we need to view tribes as partners and recognize that it is in our collective interest to be responsive to your needs."

Continuing, Deer said, "I don't have a magic wand, but I do have a resolute voice that has held Congress accountable in the past and I am not afraid to rise to the challenge in the future. We need to re-invent government, fortified by the lessons of history. The cornerstone of any new re-invention should be tribal sovereignty...So reform, re-invention and change are all possible, providing the protection and advancement

of tribal sovereignty are at the forefront of any new initiative."

Deer feels it is imperative that government-to-government relationships be strengthened. In that light, I was successful in getting the new tribal list published in the Federal Register, which included a listing of Alaska villages. The list eliminated the confusion over inclusion of tribal corporations and included only those entities that have a government-to-government relationship. This will have little impact on the budget...but it does strengthen the tribal status in regard to their sovereign rights."

Deer looks forward to launching several new economic development initiatives in the near future, "including ensuring that Indians have a viable role in determining their own economic agenda in President Clinton's Community Enterprise Board initiative. We must control our own destiny if we are to be empowered. In this regard, I also intend to host economic summits in South Dakota and Alaska in 1994. They will be devoted to creating effective tribal, public and private sector partnerships. We need to look at community based and inspired economic ventures that stimulate and diversity economic growth."

Deer, with all the enthusiasm of a young girl on her first day of school, looks toward the future with great anticipation. "Hope, healing, commitment to change, are in the skies all around us and they will be the hallmarks of my administration. The time is right for a partnership to fulfill long held promises and address long overdue injustices."

NCAI offers unified voice for Indian people

The year was 1944 and Denver, Colorado was the city in which the National Congress of American Indians held its first formal meeting. Indian leaders from across the United States gathered in the "Mile-High" city to discuss issues and establish the organization's charter and by-laws. NCAI has grown during the 50 years since then to the oldest Indian organization in the United States, representing over 145 tribes with a combined population of over 500,000 Indians and Alaska natives.

Located in the nation's capitol, NCAI is an advocate for Indian people. Much time is spent concentrating on legislative issues, most recently including the proposed BIA reorganization, reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, the Tribal Court Enhancement Act, American Indian Religious Freedom

Act and the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

NCAI responds to the common goals that unite Indian people. Issue committees, located throughout Indian Country, identify problems and possible solutions. Areas of emphasis include agriculture, economic development, education, health and social welfare, housing, human and religious rights, Indian child welfare, jurisdiction and tribal governments, litigation, natural resources and veterans affairs.

The organization meets twice yearly and is currently headed by president gaiashkibos, a member of the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa in Wisconsin. He is a Marine veteran of the Vietnam conflict. He holds BS and MA degrees from California State University, Fullerton.