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Letter from Joseph Wicks to Senator Langer Regarding John Hart's Speech Regarding the Rehabilitation of Indians, May 17, 1950

Joseph Wicks

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Bill.
I think this should change
the thinking of Randahl & Hart
May 17, 1950 *on Indian's*

Mr. John B. Hart
Executive Director
North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission
Rolla, North Dakota

Dear John:

Thanks very much for submitting to me an advance copy of your proposed speech to be delivered at the Rocky Mountain Regional Meeting and at the Salt Lake City Governors' Interstate Council on Indian Affairs.

I know that you wish to have me submit, as you suggest, constructive criticisms on your proposed speech and I wish to say at the outset that the criticisms I shall make are based upon my conception and understanding of what is best for the interest and welfare of the Indian race as a whole - the American Indian.

For the purpose of clarification and convenience I am quoting your proposed speech paragraph by paragraph and submitting my comments thereon following such quoted paragraphs.

"Assimilation must be the dominant goal of public policy. On this point there can be no doubt. Indian people are almost unanimous in wanting to master and benefit from the culture of our time. They want to be able to live as reasonably prosperous non-Indians do. They do not want to be 19th century story-book Indians. They want their children to live as other people live".

With respect to the above I concur in your statement and emphasize the fact that assimilation is inevitable between the Indian and the white races; however, I am convinced there is no expedient way to hasten such assimilation. Likewise, I agree with you that the Indian children as a whole desire and are in the main benefitting from white culture and in view of the fact that their contact with the white race dates back to approximately 150 years, it is evident they have made rapid progress considering the obstacles they have had to overcome. Also, I know, as a whole, the present, or majority, of the Indian people desire and are anxious for their children to enjoy the same social and economic standard of living that is comparable to their non-Indian neighbors.

"The only question we have to answer is how can this public policy best be implemented. Most of us feel that relocation realistically administered with a thorough understanding of what causes local prejudices and an elimination of these causes will produce the tangible results we desire. If relocation fails, we are going to be just about forced to agree with those who claim the only solution is total elimination of the Indian Bureau".

Concerning the above paragraph, I am unable to interpret the meaning of your statement relative to a "relocation" program. It may be that you mean a rehabilitation program. I believe some might interpret your statement above that you wish to relocate the Indian population on reservations to other parts of the country.

I don't think there is a State in the Union that contemplates doing so. I believe again that you have used the word "relocation" meaning rehabilitation and I will place this interpretation as the word being "rehabilitation" throughout this letter. Concerning the implementation of the rehabilitation of the Indians on the reservation, (and I am speaking only of the Indians in Sioux County, State of North Dakota) I believe, from an administrative standpoint, we are solving the so-called Indian problems with the local Standing Rock Agency staff in a realistic, practical and workable manner and at no additional cost to the tax payers of Sioux County. To illustrate the cooperation and accomplishments I wish to point out that the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Council on October 3, 1949 passed a resolution agreeing to the Standing Rock Tribe placing Law and Order, Education, Health and Welfare under county and state jurisdiction. In order to lay a solid foundation for the activities which have been conferred on the county and state by said resolution, I am going to take the matter up with the American Legion and the Ladies Auxilliary organizations in the three districts within Sioux County in North Dakota, which are strictly Indian organizations. Therefore, this will demonstrate the fact that the majority of the adult Indian population is likewise favorable to the county and state administering the functions of the departments mentioned above, and again in agreement with the first paragraph quoted above this will show that these Indian people want to become part of our great State. Should we deny them this right by waving a flag at them saying the tax payers don't want them? Give this some thought before answering.

"Prejudice against the Indians actually exist. This is not a theory; it is a fact. To spend time questioning whether or not there should be prejudice is like wasting time debating whether or not we should pay taxes".

I disagree with you on the above statement. This was proven by our 1949 Legislative session in the State of North Dakota when Senate SB 186, SB 223 and SCRCQ were passed unanimously by said legislators in behalf of the American Indians of this State. To further clear the mud on anti-prejudice not existing between the Whites and the Indian people, please remember just two winters ago when the white people of North Dakota responded whole-heartedly with carloads and truckloads of food, clothing and money to the plight of the North Dakota Indian. You and I, as members of the North Dakota Indian Commission, should acknowledge with gratitude the efforts and accomplishments that have been achieved by the non-Indian people of this State. The Indian people of the Standing Rock Reservation have indicated their gratitude at every opportunity to the various civic organizations in the State where they have had the opportunity to appear.

"Historically relief and hospitalization of the indigent has been the responsibility of the local real estate tax payers. These local tax payers had a large degree of control over expenditures and were able to see where their tax dollar went. Then, as today, every local administrator, as a political necessity, must exert every effort to prevent their taxpayers from being "stuck" with the relief expenditures where the same can be done legally or otherwise. The fact that our state courts have many times had to decide what political subdivision was to be "stuck" is in itself evidence of the feeling of the local people. Criminal statutes have been and probably will continue to be used for the protection of local taxpayers who are fearful of additional tax burdens".

I am somewhat in doubt as to the correct interpretation of the above paragraph and I believe that the statements you have made are too general in scope, thus leav-

ing an opportunity for misconstruing the ideas you wish to put over, I believe that we have a solution to your complaint that the local tax payers are being "stuck" legally or otherwise. The County Commissioners of Sioux County are meeting with the State Welfare Board on May 23, 1950 at which time Superintendent Clark and the Board of County Commissioners will present a plan whereby the administrative jurisdiction may be assumed by the State Welfare Board covering general assistance to the Indians on the Standing Rock Reservation in Sioux County, North Dakota. We believe this is the solution by reason of the fact the State Welfare Board now administers at least two-thirds of Indian relief through Social Security categorical assistance. Further, it would be desirable for the State Welfare Board to assume the administration of the general assistance funds appropriated by Congress for the Indian people. This would eliminate duplication of work and preclude dual authority by two agencies which, as you know, is very undesirable. I would suggest that you rewrite the above paragraph going into more detail so as to prevent misinterpretation of the ideas that you are trying to emphasize.

"The feeling that the Indians are the responsibility of the Indian Bureau is deeply engrained in the thinking of local administrators and especially local tax payers. They know that the allotment land owned by the Indians and Indian tribes is tax exempt. They know that the Indian on the reservation is entitled to hospitalization, relief and education at government expense. They have heard that in the State of Nebraska legal action was started a few years ago to force the local taxpayers to take care of the relief of off-reservation Indians. They know that the Bureau won by using legal action in the States of New Mexico and Arizona".

Again I feel that you should indicate more in detail what you mean by local administrators and local tax payers being deeply engrained in the thinking that the Indians are the responsibility of the Indian Bureau. It is an evident fact that the Indian Bureau and its personnel are responsible for the Indian people as to their welfare and property. These responsibilities were conferred by treaties ratified by the Congress of the United States. Therefore, I do not see any point in the first, second and third sentences of the above paragraph.

"Yes, the local taxpayers view with alarm the relocation program that so far promises only social headaches and additional tax burdens. They are fearful that the local tax collector is going to reach into their billfolds for the few remaining dollars they have been able to salvage for that rainy day".

In answering the paragraph above I would say that a reservation rehabilitation program if prepared upon an objective basis would eliminate any social or economic burdens upon the so-called local tax payers. I believe further that in the not too distant future the Congress will demand the preparation of such reservation rehabilitation programs in order that they may observe the results of the funds they appropriate for such rehabilitation. This is evidenced by hearings before the Appropriation Committee in Congress in refusal to go along with the Indian Bureau in trying to secure these appropriations upon a lump sum basis.

"The Indian is conscious of the fact that he is not welcomed by the taxpayers of the county. He and his friends have been told to go back to the reservation by the local welfare agencies. They know the answer

will be the same in the future although Congress tells them they are citizens and the State law residential requirements have been met. They know they will find themselves in jail as vagrants if they do not return to the reservation. The local taxpayers will not be "stuck" if he can prevent it".

I do not agree with you in this statement. My Indians are just as welcome to the counties of North Dakota as any Irishman, Russian or Scandinavian and in work programs we have had in this county. Therefore, again your statements are open to misinterpretation as you indicate that this prejudice is general and in the majority. Any one could make this interpretation from the statements you make in the paragraph above. I would suggest you again clarify this paragraph so there would be no opportunity for conflict.

"If we are to accomplish anything along the lines of relocation we are going to have to let the question of right or wrong, theory, idealism, equality, etc., set on the side line for the time being at least. We have a situation to deal with, not a theory or a question of constitutional law. We must accept as a major premise the fact that local administrators and taxpayers do not want additional relief burdens or the possibility of additional relief expenditures. Their relocation program as now outlined presents this possibility".

There is no doubt in my mind that Indian Reservation rehabilitation programs if properly prepared and administered would meet the controversial situations you present in the above paragraph.

"We must accept as a fact and as a second major premise that in certain fields of employment other laborers do not like the idea of working with Indians. Within the last two weeks the employment representative of one of the largest mines in the State of South Dakota told me that many of the laborers resented going to the same showers with Indians and Mexican employees and that the only policy in order to keep peace in the family was to just not employ the Indians if there was any way of avoiding it".

Here is my answer to that. In World I and World War II no one thought of that remark. Also in all our war factories on the West Coast and as far East as Indiana, Standing Rock Indian men, girls and in some cases middle aged women of predominant Indian blood were employed, ate at the same tables with the whites and took baths in the same showers as the whites. They were very glad to have them. The same holds true of the young boys in the old CCC camps. I had Indian boys from practically every State in the Union in CCC camps. I am shocked to hear that a minority in the State of South Dakota would make such a statement. Again I must conclude that you are referring only to the minority cases and that your statements would not be true with regard to the majority. This attitude on the part of such an employer could be changed by publicity as it is a breach of the civil liberties of the Indian people. Legal action has been taken in other states where such discriminations were in effect. A letter to the Civil Liberties Committee on Civil Rights with the facts in the case will bring immediate investigation for prosecution where such discriminations exist.

"The present relocation program appears to me to be like a weather vane--pointing in the right direction because of the pressure of the

Hoover Report and the wind of popular demand, but it lacks the power of going forward and dealing with realities. Like so many programs for the Indians, it has no follow-up or follow-through. The Hoover Report suggests that the follow-up include assistance to the local governments so as to eliminate the resistance which is real and important to the Indian applying at the local welfare office. Why is it that the Indian Bureau budget estimate for 1951 in the state of North Dakota alone amounts to \$340,000 for welfare services for Indians on reservations but not one dollar for the human being that does not happen to want to be a 19th century story-book Indian. Why is it that the 1951 estimates for North Dakota include \$423,779 for reservation hospitalization but not one dollar for the sick off-reservation Indian or his family who is attempting to be a self-sufficient American. I presume that the answer is as usual that some local taxpayers will get "stuck" or the Indian and his family will somehow find their way back to the reservation for that necessary care which they could have just as well received without such unnecessary expensive travel".

With reference to the statement about a relief program being like a weather vane pointing in the right direction because of the Hoover Report, I wish to point out your statements would be incorrect as to the Standing Rock Sioux Rehabilitation program which was presented and justified before the Hoover Report was made. This presentation and justification was made before the Public Lands Committee in the House and the authorization bill for the implementation of the provisions of the program was introduced in the House by Congressman Lemke of North Dakota on April 1, 1949. It was designated as H.R. 3974 and was passed by unanimous consent in the House of Representatives. The companion bill, S.1541, was introduced in the Senate by Senator Milton R. Young of North Dakota on April 8, 1949 and has been referred to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. On May 11, 1950 the subcommittee reported unanimously in favor of this bill.

The Standing Rock Rehabilitation Bill above mentioned has the support and endorsement of the entire North Dakota delegation in Congress. Therefore, I feel that this program is practical, sound and workable, otherwise it would not have the entire endorsement of our Senators and Congressmen.

"Without hesitation or mental reservation I will say that in my opinion the present relocation program is going to fail unless and until the Indian Bureau recognizes the realities of local resistance. Why is it that we cannot give the Indian off the reservation, the same advantages he receives on the reservation? For the Indian who wants to leave the reservation lets neutralize the pressure of local officials forcing him to return during periods of adversity. Let's take away the premium of returning to the blanket, but if he does return to the blanket let's at least be honest and direct our criticisms toward the agency which continues to ignore these prejudices and not at the individual person who happens to be the victim. Let's give him the same chance that we ourselves demand as a right.

"Let's prove to the world that an American attempting to live off the reservation can and will secure as good housing as do the other citizens of this democracy. Let's eliminate our dump-ground