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Address from Senator Langer to a Town Meeting Regarding Giving American Indians A Square Deal, August 21, 1947

William Langer

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ADDRESS OF SENATOR WILLIAM LANGER, AUGUST 21,
TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR PROGRAM IN SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO,
ON THE SUBJECT - "ARE WE GIVING OUR AMERICAN INDIANS A SQUARE DEAL?"

Those who know as I do about the American Indian and the manner in which he has been pushed around for many years realize full well that he has been getting no square deal from his Government in granting him rights as a citizen and not as a ward of the nation.

It has been suggested on the program that we come directly to the point in the outset, therefore my reasons for making the open statement are as follows:

1. Indian tribes have been forced into primitive ways of living.
2. In recent years the Interior Department's power over the Indian has been magnified.
3. Individual initiative of the Indian has been discouraged by legal complications.
4. Ownership of property and promotion of private enterprise on an individual basis by the Indian has been discouraged and destroyed.
5. The Office of Indian Affairs has undertaken to make a guinea pig of the Indian by subjecting him to sociological and socialistic experiments for which he had never bargained when he submitted to the voluntary tribe provisions under the Wheeler-Howard Act. Each day the Indian is under this voluntary condition of servitude.
6. The legal tangle of his property and his inheritance is getting worse through federal trusteeship.
7. Those Indians who still are not land owners certainly are not being helped by the Land Purchase Program.
8. The Office of Indian Affairs has developed into an autocratic and arbitrary agency with respect to its relationship with the Indian. This Bureau admits a number of the tribes are ready for complete removal of Government supervision and that others ultimately will be ready, yet under our doing-nothing policy the Indian is sinking deeper into the mire of red tape, control and general dictation back there in Washington.
9. The Indian should be a free man, as free as any of the rest of us. He should never be in position where he must surrender any of his God-given rights to breathe the same free air as any other man on this earth.

The shackles which have bound many Indians should be broken without further delay. He should have the right to stand on his own feet, assume his full obligations as a citizen and take his place in the bright sunlight of Americanism.

10. No longer is the reservation system necessary, yet it is kept in force by the policies of the Office of Indian Affairs.

11. The Indian is required to hold property in common and yet endure segregation by living separately from the rest of our Americans.

12. In New Mexico and Arizona the Indian cannot vote because he is under guardianship and therefore not taxed, yet during every war we are reminded by Indians in uniform that they spill their full quota of blood and make their full portion of sacrifices the same as the rest of our people. The right to share in the decisions as part of the electorate is a tremendous price to pay for being tax-free, now at a time when every human is fast becoming a citizen not only of his own narrow national confines but of the world. The restrictions setting up such partitions among Americans, be they Red, White, Black or Yellow, serve well to set off part of the citizenry and, in this year of enlightenment, should be abolished.

I anticipate some of the negative arguments may include the claim that the Indian's use of Indian land has increased in contrast to the White man's use of Indian land. It should be remembered that when the Indian was pushed back to the far less desirable lands his only recourse was in making highly intensive use of his land, or starve.

My Friend, Secretary Chapman, may even suggest that the rights of Indians to their own customs have been respected and encouraged. Mr. Chapman should have graced the hearings of the Committee on Civil Service last spring, when we heard many complaints to the contrary. All of these complaints are a matter of public record, including the calculated practice of working up criminal charges against Indians on some reservations who showed the slightest sign of recovery from the opiate of quiescence.

For these and many other reasons for which there no time to elaborate, I stand squarely in the affirmative position of saying that the Indian has not received a square deal.