

*National Congress of American Indians*  
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March 10, 1954

NAA, NCAI Papers, Box 28,  
FM: Correspondence (1954-59)

The President,  
The White House,  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

Knowing your deep and abiding concern with the welfare of American Indians, we are taking this opportunity to transmit to you what we believe to be a sincere statement of Indian feeling on legislation now pending in the Congress.

The attached Declaration of Indian Rights was drafted and approved by delegates to the Emergency Conference of American Indians on Legislation held in Washington February 25-28 under the auspices of the National Congress of American Indians.

These delegates, representing 43 tribes, bands, and groups from 21 states and the Territory of Alaska, spoke for 183,000 of their fellow tribesmen in opposition to what they believe to be a hasty and ill-considered termination of Federal responsibility to Indians.

Remembering your repeated pledge to consult with the Indian people on questions of policy affecting them, we pray you will heed their declaration and join them in opposing legislation which would violate their sacred treaties with the Federal Government.

We deeply appreciate your consideration.

Very sincerely,

*Joseph R. Garry*  
Joseph R. Garry, President

Enclosure

President: Joseph R. Garry, Coeur d'Alene; First Vice President: Martin T. Cross, Gros Ventre; Second Vice President: Freda A. Beazley, Assiniboine; Treasurer: Ruth Muskrat Bronson, Cherokee; Executive Director: Helen L. Peterson, Oglala Sioux; Executive Council: George N. Adams, Skokomish; Frank George, Nez Perce; Lorena D. Jorg, Ute; Dan M. Madrano, Caddo; James R. Mosier, Osage; Abel Paisano, Pueblo; Frank W. Parker, Shoshone-Bannock; W. H. H. Pilcher, Omaha; Ramon A. Rouideaux, Sioux; Sam C. Scott, Warm Springs; John Shaw, Osage; W. W. Short, Chickasaw; Peter Star, Arikara; Edison G. Ward, Sioux; Clarence Wesley, Apache.

## A DECLARATION OF INDIAN RIGHTS

Representatives of 183,000 American Indians gathered to consider the emergency created by numerous bills now pending in the Congress make to their fellow American citizens the following declaration:

American Indians seek for themselves only those things that are promised to every American citizen by our National charters, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence: Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and enjoyment of the rights of citizenship which it is the duty of Government to secure to all.

The Government of the United States first dealt with our tribal governments as sovereign equals. In exchange for Federal protection and the promise of certain benefits our ancestors gave forever to the people of the United States title to the very soil of our beloved country. We have never asked anything except that this protection be continued and these benefits be provided in good faith.

Today the Federal Government is threatening to withdraw this protection and these benefits. We believe that the American people will not permit our Government to act in this way if they know that these proposals do not have Indian consent; that these proposals, if adopted, will tend to destroy our tribal governments; that they may well leave our older people destitute; and that the effect of many of these proposals will be to force our people into a way of life that some of them are not willing or are not ready to adopt.

We feel that many of our fellow Americans do not know that we are citizens, free to move about the country like every one else. We fight for our country, and we pay taxes like everyone else, except on the land and property our ancestors retained by agreement with the United States Government.

Some of our fellow Americans think that our reservations are places of confinement. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Reservations do not imprison us. They are ancestral homelands, retained by us for our perpetual use and enjoyment. We feel we must assert our right to maintain ownership in our own way, and to terminate it only by our consent.

If the Federal Government will continue to deal with our tribal officials as it did with our ancestors on a basis of full equality; if it will deal with us as individuals as it does with other Americans, governing only by consent, we will be enabled to take our rightful place in our communities, to discharge our full responsibilities as citizens, and yet remain faithful to the Indian way of life.

CERTIFICATION: Adopted at the final session by the delegates to the "Emergency Conference of American Indians on Legislation" called by the National Congress of American Indians in Washington, D.C., Feb. 28, 1954.

*Joseph R. Garry*  
Joseph R. Garry, President  
*Martin T. Cross*  
Martin T. Cross, Vice President

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