

signed a bill approved by the Eighty-third Congress that signified a landmark in Indian legislative history. By this measure's terms an Indian tribe and its members, the Menominee of Wisconsin, were assured that after a brief transition period they would at last have full control of their own affairs and would possess all of the attributes of complete American citizenship. This was a most worthy moment in our history. We should all dwell upon its deep meaning. Considering the lengthy span of our Indian relationship, the recency of this event is significant. Obviously, such affirmative action for the great majority of Indians has just begun. Moreover, it should be noted that the foundations laid are solid.

Philosophically speaking, the Indian wardship problem brings up basically the questionable merit of treating the Indian of today as an Indian, rather than as a fellow American citizen. Now, doing away with restrictive federal supervision over Indians, as such, does *not* affect the retention of those cultural and racial qualities which people of Indian descent would wish to retain; many of us are proud of our ancestral heritage, but that does not nor should it alter our status as American citizens. The distinction between abolishment of wardship and abandonment of the Indian heritage is vitally important. . . .

Unfortunately, the major and continuing Congressional movement toward full freedom was delayed for a time by the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Wheeler-Howard Act. Amid the deep social concern of the depression years, Congress deviated from its accustomed policy under the concept of promoting the general Indian welfare. In the postdepression years Congress—realizing this change of policy—sought to return to the historic principles of much earlier decades. Indeed, one of the original authors of the Act was desirous of its repeal. We should recall, however, that war years soon followed in which Congress found itself engrossed in problems first of national defense and then of mutual security. As with many other major projects, action was thus delayed. . . .

We may admit the it-takes-time view, but we should not allow it to lull us into inaction.

Freedom of action for the Indian as a full-fledged citizen—that is the continuing aim. Toward this end Congress and the Administration, state and local governments, Indian tribes and members, interested private agencies, and individual Americans as responsible citizens should all be united and work constantly. The legislatively set target dates for Indian freedom serve as significant spurs to accomplishment. Congress steadily continues to inform itself, to seek out, delimit, and assist those Indians most able to profit immediately by freedom from special supervision, and it acts primarily to speed the day for all Indian tribes and members to be relieved of their wardship status. A basic purpose of Congress in setting up the Indian Claims Commission was to clear the way toward complete freedom of the Indians by assuring a final settlement of all obligations—real or purported—of the federal government to the Indian tribes and other groups. . . .

The basic principle enunciated so clearly and approved unanimously by the Senate and House in House Concurrent Resolution 108 of the Eighty-third Congress continues to be the over-all guiding policy of Congress in Indian affairs. In view of the historic policy of Congress favoring freedom for the Indians, we may well expect future Congresses to continue to indorse the principle that “as rapidly as possible” we should end the status of Indians as wards of the government and grant them all of the rights and prerogatives pertaining to American citizenship.

With the aim of “equality before the law” in mind our course should rightly be no other. Firm and constant consideration for those of Indian ancestry should lead us all to work diligently and carefully for the full realization of their national citizenship with all other Americans. Following in the footsteps of the Emancipation Proclamation of ninety-four years ago, I see the following words emblazoned in letters of fire above the heads of the Indians—*THESE PEOPLE SHALL BE FREE!*

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148. Senator Watkins on Termination Policy

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The principal congressional promoter of the termination policy was Senator Arthur V. Watkins of Utah. In an article published in 1957 he gave a clear statement of the policy and of the arguments for it.

Virtually since the first decade of our national life the Indian, as tribesman and individual, was accorded a status apart. Now, however, we think constructively and affirmatively of the Indian as a fellow American. We seek to assure that in health, education, and welfare, in social, political, economic, and cultural opportunity, he or she stands as one with us in the enjoyment and responsibilities of our national citizenship. It is particularly gratifying to know that recent years of united effort, mutual planning, and Indian self-appraisal truly have begun to bear increasing fruit.

One facet of this over-all development concerns the freeing of the Indians from special federal restrictions on the property and the person of the tribes and their members. This is not a novel development, but a natural outgrowth of our relationship with the Indians. Congress is fully agreed upon its accomplishment. By unanimous vote in both the Senate and the House of Representatives termination of such special federal supervision has been called for as soon as possible. . . .

A little more than two years ago—June 17, 1954—President Dwight D. Eisenhower