

CONSTRUCTION
(Roads and Trails)

Throughout the years the Federal Government has assumed the responsibility for the construction and maintenance of roads on Indian Reservations. Appropriations for this work have been meager and road improvements on reservations have lagged far behind those in non-Indian areas. The United States in general has prospered and has developed its resources; its people are enjoying the highest standard of living in the world. I think that everyone will agree that a system of adequate highways is absolutely essential for economic growth and prosperity. While the rest of the country has prospered, however, many Indian reservations are still back in the horse and buggy days as far as roads are concerned. In fact, much of the Navajo country can even be classed in the pack-train days because vast areas do not even have wagon trails. Consequently, we find today several hundred thousands of Indians enjoying standards of living very similar to that of primitive peoples in backward parts of the world. It is somewhat ridiculous to talk about withdrawing Federal assistance and supervision

from some of these areas and transferring responsibility to state and local governments until the Federal Government has fulfilled its obligation of giving these areas an adequate road system. The budget submitted to the Congress this year recognizes the fact that this was one of the primary steps that has to be taken before the Federal Government can withdraw from these areas. The Bureau of Indian Affairs for the past year or so has been redoubling its efforts to get local governmental units (counties and states) to take over the road systems on these reservations. In many instances they have been able to persuade counties and states to take over the maintenance of roads that have been brought up to standard. The budget estimate submitted to the Congress this year suggested that four million dollars of the ten million dollars requested be earmarked specifically for roads that could be brought up to standard and turned over to local governmental units. The estimate as reported out by the Appropriations Committee provides virtually nothing in the way of road construction funds to do this important job.

It appears that while this Congress recognizes the importance of good road systems throughout the country as a whole and in fact in primitive areas through the world as evidenced in the Foreign Aid Program, we are too shortsighted to make the initial investment required in getting out of the Indian business.

Many people have stated that we should integrate the Indians with the rest of the population. Certainly, this is an all-important step, but I would like to know how such integration can take place when many of these areas lack the transportation facilities necessary to permit non-reservation people to travel to the reservations or to permit Indians to go off and see the rest of the world. These Indian people in many areas have approximately the same chance of mingling with the general population as our great grandfathers had in the early history of our country.

I think it should be pointed out that lack of roads has not only retarded the economic growth of the area but has added considerably to the federal cost of maintaining the limited services that are provided,

such as schools and hospitals.

This action affects Indian road work in 24 states; failure to keep pace with over-all State road improvements has and is impeding over-all development of the highway systems of these States.

This Congress has recognized the problem that exists on Indian reservations by making special provision in the Federal Aid Highway Act and in the recent Navajo-Hopi Rehabilitation Act for road construction and maintenance. However, these authorizations are somewhat similar to many other promises that have been made to the Indians from time to time and have been broken.