

Indians Are Hopeful Nixon Administr

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Leaders of America's impoverished Indians hope to find out by the end of February whether the Nixon Administration will come to their aid with more than rhetoric.

And no Indian appears more hopeful of a positive Republican attitude than the wife of Sen-

ator Fred R. Harris, the Democratic National Chairman. fare and the director of the Office of Economic Opportunity to report within 30 days on the Government's ability to meet the requests.

Despite loyalty to her husband's political party, Mrs. Harris said in an interview that she hoped the Republicans would come to the rescue. "If Indian people get the benefit, all the better," she said. "Then the next Democratic Administration would have to do better."

Mrs. Harris confirmed that there was some resentment among Indian leaders that it took a year for Vice President Agnew to call his first meeting of the council. Its executive di-

rector, Robert Robertson, attributed this to the slowness of Congress in appropriating operating funds.

But once the meeting had been called, the Indian members were pleased with Mr. Agnew's statements and, according to Mrs. Harris, delighted that the agenda was changed to allow the Indians to present their case before any of the Cabinet members spoke.

Some sources said that the agenda was changed at the insistence of President Nixon's staff, as a sign of a growing desire on the President's part to demonstrate a will to help the Indians. Mr. Robertson



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Mrs. LaDonna Harris

ator Fred R. Harris, the Democratic National Chairman.

Mrs. LaDonna Harris, an Oklahoma Comanche leader, is one of six Indian members of the National Council on Indian Opportunity, a two-year-old White House panel that held its first meeting under the Nixon Administration here recently.

The rhetoric at the meeting apparently was encouraging. Vice President Agnew, the council's chairman, called it "outrageous" that Indians are the most poverty-stricken of Americans and said the Administration would try to "attack that raw truth."

Now Mrs. Harris and the other Indian members of the council are waiting to learn if pledges of performances will match the rhetoric. They presented a package of about 50 requests for help—a "grocery list," as Mrs. Harris termed it—ranging from the creation of an Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior to a "massive infusion of funds" for the education of Indian children.

Mr. Agnew instructed the Secretaries of Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, Housing and Urban Development, and Health, Education and Wel-

ation Will Match Words With Deeds

maintained that the Vice President had ordered the agenda changed.

If concern over an agenda seemed like a small thing, it was significant to the Indians, who voiced dismay about past failures to let them help make decisions affecting their future.

The list of Indian requests is not unlike pleas for help from other poor Americans: bureaucratic changes to cut red tape, better schools and more say in running them, economic assistance in developing job-producing industry, legal aid, highways, better housing and improved health care.

Unlike other poor Americans,

however, most Indians are legal wards of the Government. They have no city councilman to whom they can complain, and no strong legislative lobby to take their side.

A Step Forward

Even the fact that the White House council met is regarded by its Indian members as a step forward. As their position paper noted, "For the Indian people across the nation to know that at this moment the Vice President and Cabinet officers are sitting in a working session with Indian leaders is to alleviate some of the cynicism and despair rife among them."

The 29-page list of requests presented at the meeting was the first comprehensive set of goals the Indians have set for the Government in dealing with them. Mrs. Harris said that the Cabinet members' responses would show whether the Nixon Administration is serious about meeting the goals.

Thus Mrs. Harris emphasized the importance the Indians will place on the next council meeting, soon after the 30-day deadline Mr. Agnew set for departmental replies.

"One month isn't too bad, after all these years," said Mrs. Harris, "to wait and see how sincere they are."