

DECLARATION OF POLICY IN THE  
ADMINISTRATION OF INDIAN AFFAIRS.

During the past four years the efforts of the administration of Indian affairs have been largely concentrated on the following fundamental activities—the betterment of health conditions of Indians, the suppression of the liquor traffic among them, the improvement of their industrial conditions, the further development of vocational training in their schools, and the protection of the Indians' property. Rapid progress has been made along all these lines, and the work thus reorganized and revitalized will go on with increased energy. With these activities and accomplishments well under way, we are now ready to take the next step in our administrative program.

The time has come for discontinuing guardianship of all competent Indians and giving even closer attention to the incompetent that they may more speedily achieve competency.

Broadly speaking, a policy of greater liberalism will henceforth prevail in Indian administration to the end that every Indian, as soon as he has been determined to be as competent to transact his own business as the average white man, shall be given full control of his property and have all his lands and moneys turned over to him, after which he will no longer be a ward of the Government.

Pursuant to this policy, the following rules shall be observed:

1. *Patents in fee.*—To all able-bodied adult Indians of less than one-half Indian blood, there will be given as far as may be under the law full and complete control of all their property. Patents in fee shall be issued to all adult Indians of one-half or more Indian blood who may, after careful investigation, be found competent, provided, that where deemed advisable patents in fee shall be withheld for not to exceed 40 acres as a home.

Indian students, when they are 21 years of age, or over, who complete the full course of instruction in the Government schools, receive diplomas and have demonstrated competency will be so declared.

2. *Sale of lands.*—A liberal ruling will be adopted in the matter of passing upon applications for the sale of inherited Indian lands

where the applicants retain other lands and the proceeds are to be used to improve the homesteads or for other equally good purposes. A more liberal ruling than has hitherto prevailed will hereafter be followed with regard to the applications of noncompetent Indians for the sale of their lands where they are old and feeble and need the proceeds for their support.

3. *Certificates of competency.*—The rules which are made to apply in the granting of patents in fee and the sale of lands will be made equally applicable in the matter of issuing certificates of competency.

4. *Individual Indian moneys.*—Indians will be given unrestricted control of all their individual Indian moneys upon issuance of patents in fee or certificates of competency. Strict limitations will not be placed upon the use of funds of the old, the indigent, and the invalid.

5. *Pro-rata shares-trust funds.*—As speedily as possible their pro rata shares in tribal trust or other funds shall be paid to all Indians who have been declared competent, unless the legal status of such funds prevents. Where practicable the pro rata shares of incompetent Indians will be withdrawn from the Treasury and placed in banks to their individual credit.

6. *Elimination of ineligible pupils from the Government Indian schools.*—In many of our boarding schools Indian children are being educated at Government expense whose parents are amply able to pay for their education and have public school facilities at or near their homes. Such children shall not hereafter be enrolled in Government Indian schools supported by gratuity appropriations, except on payment of actual per capita cost and transportation.

These rules are hereby made effective, and all Indian Bureau administrative officers at Washington and in the field will be governed accordingly.

This is a new and far-reaching declaration of policy. It means the dawn of a new era in Indian administration. It means that the competent Indian will no longer be treated as half ward and half citizen. It means reduced appropriations by the Government and more self-respect and independence for the Indian. It means the ultimate absorption of the Indian race into the body politic of the Nation.

It means, in short, the beginning of the end of the Indian problem.

In carrying out this policy, I cherish the hope that all real friends of the Indian race will lend their aid and hearty cooperation.

CAYO SELLS,  
Commissioner.

Approved:  
FRANKLIN K. LANE,  
Secretary.

Indian Commissioner Sells, A Declaration of Policy  
Extract from the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs

October 15, 1917

Commissioner Cayo Sells worked to free the Indians from federal guardianship. In 1917 he issued a new statement of policy, which would speed up declarations of competency for individual Indians and force them out into the white man's society.

A DECLARATION OF POLICY.

A careful study of the practical effects of governmental policies for determining the wardship of the Indians of this country is convincing that the solution is individual and not collective. Each individual must be considered in the light of his own environment and capacity for larger responsibilities; and privileges.

While ethnologically a preponderance of white blood has not heretofore been a crite-

rium of competency, nor even now is it always a safe standard, it is almost an axiom that an Indian who has a larger proportion of white blood than Indian partakes more of the characteristics of the former than of the latter. In thought and action, so far as the business world is concerned, he approximates more closely to the white blood ancestry.

On April 17, 1917, there was announced a declaration of policy for Indian affairs, as follows: