

Chairman Aspinall there expressed similar sentiments (H. 5056) :

"The second argument is that conveyance of the land to the Indians, rather than payment of money under the Indian Claims Commission award, would establish an undesirable precedent of giving Indians national forest lands instead of money. I am convinced that it would not establish any precedent. The report of the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, at the top of page 4, specifically states that the enactment of the bill will not be considered as a precedent and gives the reasons for that conclusion. The land is immediately adjacent to the existing Pueblo. The Indians have continuously used the land since the year 1400, despite the government taking in 1906. The land is vital to the continued welfare of the Indians, particularly the protection of their religion. After careful search, our committee staff has found no other case like this one. The enactment of the bill will be a recognition of the unique interests of this one Indian group, and would in no way be a recognition of any obligation on the part of the government to return land to other Indian tribes who have claims which blanket the entire United States."

The Pueblo believes, with Representative Aspinall (H. 5056) that:

"The issue before us is simple: Do the Indians or the Forest Service have the greater need for this land?"

That issue should be resolved as Representative Saylor resolved it (H. 5056) :

"* * * The Pueblo de Taos Indians need this land more than the Forest Service needs it."

He pointed out (H. 5057) that a maximum of 90 non-Indians have in recent years been allowed to enter the area "for camping and recreational purposes," and that in at least one year no non-Indians were admitted. Surely such limited recreational use does not outweigh the needs of 1,500 Taos Indians for control over their religion's sanctuary, for if these sacred lands cannot be held in their natural state for the Indians' religious purposes the ancient culture of the Pueblo will disintegrate. Destruction of the Indians' culture is too great a price to pay for the convenience of a few sportsmen.

Mr. SCHAAB. I would like to touch on three things. First, I would like to describe the religion of the Taos Pueblo Indians. I would then like to summarize as briefly as I can the history of their claim relating to the Blue Lake area, the watershed of the Rio Pueblo de Taos and finally, I would like to touch on the questions relating to whether or not approval of H.R. 3306 might be deemed to create an unfavorable precedent.

With respect to the religion of the Taos Indians, I believe the religious theology and practices, although they are secret, can, in broad terms, be described in relation to the traditional practice of Americans as Christians.

The Christian religion is, of course, concerned with man's relationship to God, the individual's relationship to his family and to the church, the body of Christ on earth.

The Indian's religion is concerned with the individual's relationship to his community, the Taos Pueblo, and to the natural environment, which is principally the watershed of the Rio Pueblo de Taos, and in which the Indian and his community exist.

As Christianity has its symbols, the cross, the altar, the chalice, the wafer, so also do the Taos Pueblo Indians have their symbols, their holy sacred symbols. The most sacred are the river, the Rio Pueblo de Taos, and the source of that river, the Blue Lake.

The importance of those symbols to the Indians is certainly comparable in every way to the importance of the principle of Christian symbols to American Christians. The river is perhaps the most significant of the Indian symbols. It flows perennially and eternally. The flow of the river certainly is symbolic of the passage of time, the fact that people exist in history, that the community of the Pueblo has existed through time.