

STATEMENT
OF
SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE
VICE CHAIRMAN
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE
FEBRUARY 28, 2001
HEARING
TO RECEIVE THE VIEWS
OF THE
SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
GALE NORTON

Mr. Chairman, I join you in welcoming Secretary Norton to the Committee, and like you, I look forward to a relationship that is Built upon the common goals we share in improving the quality of life in Indian Country.

We have challenges to face in Native America – there can be no question that we do.

But it is my firm belief that the best solutions for problems confronting Indian Country can be found in tribal communities.

So I was heartened to read the Secretary's statement and learn that she plans to base her relations with Indian Country on consultation, cooperation and communication .

Too often in our past , the word "consultation" has been given a strange meaning by the government.

It has meant that we tell the Native people what the government intends to do – after a decision has been reached and action is either about to be taken or already has been initiated.

Most People in Indian Country would tell us that that is not consultation.

So I hope that when we use the term "consultation", we share a common understanding that consultation should begin well before any policy has been developed or any decision has been made.

There is much wisdom in Native America – we would do well to recognize that and call upon those who are experts in these matters, because it is the Native people, not those of us in Washington, who will be directly affected by anything that the government does .

Madam Secretary, You are fortunate to have the support of thousands of Indian Country's

citizens who want to work with you to assure that your administration is a Success, and that your legacy will be a positive one for Native America.

I am confident that it can be, and that working together with those of us in the Congress who have pledged our commitment to tribal communities across America, we can make a significant difference.

Mr. Chairman, a few weeks ago, Senator Akaka and I, along with the house members of Hawaii's congressional delegation, had the opportunity to meet with Secretary Norton on matters affecting Native Hawaiians.

I am hopeful that we can work together to assure that the indigenous, Native People of Hawaii are afforded the same status under federal law as the other Native people of the United States.

Madam Secretary, we look forward to working with you.