

Pick-Sloan Act & Loss of Honesty - Vernon Ashley - OSEU #6

While I was in the service from 1942 to 1946, in 1943, the Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Indian Affairs went to me before Congress to explain to him what the Pick's long plan was to do, to harness the Missouri and build these earthen dams and inundate thousands of acres of land. But the general of the Corps of Engineers was Pick, and he was a stubborn guy, and so he said, we don't have to contact the tribes, we'll take their land by condemnation.

That all these things I faced when I came back from, that was in 1943, so I was discharged in 1946, and then went into tribal leadership role, and faced all these big problems. And the first thing, we had to form a government. So then I thought, I told my, you know, at that time, the councilmen were not educated, but the one thing they had was honesty, and they all wanted to do something for the good of the people, and that honesty we have lost.

And of course it took, then I said, I told the council, we've got to have a lawyer, because we're going to be facing all these difficulties. And so, my first trip into Washington was to hire a lawyer, and I selected Ramon Rubidoux, who at that time was a young Indian lawyer, but what he did was he had to make contact with a Washington lawyer, and so when we got into Washington, the Bureau of Indian Affairs didn't like his partner. I guess he had a run-in with the Bureau, and so the Bureau wouldn't approve of Ramon.

So then we came back, and the next thing, we contacted the former governor of South Dakota, M.Q. Sharp, and so then he was approved. You know, M.Q. Sharp was really well-named. When you were talking, he would sit with his eyes closed, and the Indian people would go, wah, I want you to watch him, he might be sleeping. But the thing was, he would say, concentrating on what you were saying, and give you an answer. So I told him, he's smart, you know, and he went with me before Congress.