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J. Hugo Aronson discusses findings of the Montana Advisory Committee on Civil Rights

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Gov. J. Hugo Aronson has hailed the findings of the Montana Advisory Committee on Civil Rights as "another milestone on Montana's road to a great future."

The Montana committee, headed by Dean Robert E. Sullivan of the Montana State University Law School at Missoula, turned up no evidence of civil rights problems in Montana in the course of nearly a year's study. Other members of the committee are Arthur F. Lamey of Billings, Stephen C. DeMers of Butte, T. Mark Radcliffe of Helena, and Joseph Hocking of Glasgow.

Discrimination in public accommodations, employment, and the administration of justice will receive further study in Montana now that Congress has extended the life of the President's Commission on Civil Rights, according to Dean Sullivan.

The work of the committee will contribute to a study in these three areas being made on a national level by the commission, the dean said. The Montana committee will also continue its study of Montana's Indian problem.

Since its organization in November 1958, the committee has conducted studies, on the recommendation of the national commission, in the areas of housing, voting, and education. On its own initiative, the committee also studied the status of migratory workers, the local administration of justice, and the civil-rights aspects of the Indian problem in Montana.

The committee found no civil rights problems in Montana, except in isolated instances which were not concentrated with respect to any particular race, color, or creed, the dean said. The few cases encountered can not be regarded as setting any pattern of discrimination in Montana, the committee reported.

Charges of discrimination, particularly against Indians, are largely due to local concerns and economic pressures that have little or nothing to do with discrimination because of race, color, or creed, the committee concluded.

(more)
"It is very good news to Montanans to find that civil rights problems present no barrier to Montana's progress," Governor Aronson commented. "Of particular importance is the bipartisan committee's finding that the few isolated cases they found do not fit into any pattern of discrimination.

"I was also very interested, as a Blackfeet chief myself, in the fact that there is no discrimination against our Montana Indians due to race, color, or creed. I am in agreement that there is a need to further accent education of our Indians to their responsibilities."

The committee met in January with the Montana Inter-tribal Policy Board, Dean Sullivan said. At this meeting, it was the consensus of the Inter-tribal Policy Board that there was too much paternalism by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the administration of the needs of the Montana Indian. This opinion seems to be supported by the committee's report, which states that "a large part of the problem in Montana lies in educating the Indian to his responsibilities."

The committee will continue its inquiry into the Indian problem, according to Dean Sullivan. If requests and complaints filed with the committee indicate a need for study in areas other than the three suggested by the national commission, the Montana group will undertake them, too, he added.

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