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INTERIOR FAVORS BILL TO BROADEN UTAH STATE PROGRAM USING OIL REVENUES FOR NAVAJO BENEFIT

The Department of the Interior said today it has recommended enactment of Federal legislation (S.2384) that would bring greater benefits to Navajo Indians living in San Juan County, Utah, from the leasing of reservation lands for oil and gas development.

Under a 1933 law, which added about half a million acres of public land in Utah to the Navajo Reservation, 37½ percent of the oil and gas revenues from these lands are paid to the State of Utah to be spent for tuition of Indian children in public schools, for road construction and maintenance in the area, and for the benefit of Indians residing in the area.

These purposes have proved too limited, Assistant Secretary John A. Carver, Jr., pointed out. Although nearly $4 million had been paid to the State under terms of the law by September 1961, only about $250 thousand of this had been spent. In litigation now pending, two Navajo Indians have challenged the expenditures.

The proposed legislation would change the 1933 law by broadening the purposes for which the oil and gas revenues may be spent to benefit the Navajos, by extending the benefits to all Navajos residing in San Juan County instead of just those living in the former public land area added to the reservation (where many Navajos live only part-time), and by authorizing the State of Utah to establish a joint commission with the Navajo Tribe for administering the law.

While the Department has had no formal expression of opinion from the Navajo Tribe on the pending bill, Assistant Secretary Carver indicated his understanding that "the bill as written is the result of mutual efforts of the tribe and the State of Utah to solve common problems encountered in the administration of the original act."

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