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The Department of the Interior has recommended enactment of S. 3198, a bill which would permit leasing of Indian lands on all reservations for terms up to a maximum of 99 years, Assistant Secretary Roger Ernst announced today.

Such authority was provided for lands of the Palm Springs Reservation in California by legislation which Congress enacted last year, Mr. Ernst pointed out, and similar bills are pending in Congress which would affect lands of the Navajo Tribe, the Seminoles of Florida and the Torres-Martinez Indians of California.

Under present law, leasing of lands on reservations except for Palm Springs is limited to 25 years with an option to renew for an additional 25-year period.

“There is no reason," Mr. Ernst said, “why the authority should be granted to one tribe and denied to another. All tribes should have the authority available for use when it is needed.”

Mr. Ernst explained that difficult problems arise under present laws limiting leases to the equivalent of a 50-year period. By the time the lessee obtains financial backing, the lease has less than 50 years to run, and the Federal Reserve Act and the National Housing Act require a minimum of 50-year leases before approving loans secured by lease holdings.