Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall announced today that, in keeping with a Congressional directive, a proposed bill to end Federal supervision over the Seneca Nation of Indians of New York has been sent to the Congress.

Udall said that Indian Commissioner Robert L. Bennett and other Bureau of Indian Affairs representatives have held several meetings with the Senecas to discuss the problem. The Seneca Tribal Council recently passed a resolution which says that while the tribe recognizes the necessity of the legislation, a majority of its members are "opposed to altering the relationship which now exists between the Federal Government and the Seneca Nation and specifically (the tribe) is opposed to any form of termination. “

Legislation passed in August 1964 awarded the Senecas $15 million for relocation and rehabilitation after one-third of their Allegany Reservation had been taken for the Kinzua Dam Reservoir. It provided for services by the BIA and other Federal agencies in effecting rehabilitation. But it also required that a plan for the complete withdrawal of Federal supervision over the property and affairs of the Seneca Nation and its members be submitted to the Congress by August 31, 1967.

The proposed bill provides that statutes of the United States which apply to Indians because of their status as Indians shall cease to apply to the Senecas on a date to be determined. This would free the Seneca Nation of Federal control over the use and disposition of its property and allow the Indians to use or dispose of their' lands, subject only to state laws.

The draft legislation would go into effect only if approved by a majority of Seneca eligible voters. It would preserve the provisions of the Treaty of November 11, 1794 between the United States and the Six (Iroquois) Nations which acknowledges the established reservations and protects the Indians in the free use and enjoyment of them. The Senecas are one of the Six Nations.

The draft bill would give the Senecas the option of accepting a lump sum payment equal to the amount which, if invested at six percent interest, would provide the $6,000 now paid the Seneca Nation annually under old treaty provisions, or of continuing to receive the annuities which would be distributed by the tribe.

The Senecas received $3 million for the actual loss of land, improvements, and wildlife, and for relocation costs, and $12 million for a comprehensive program of rehabilitation of the distressed Indian community under provisions of the law which requires the submission of a termination proposal.

In the last three years the Senecas have:

Expended about $1.97 million in settling claims of individuals for direct damages through loss of land and improvements, for loss of earnings, and for a per capita distribution.

Expended about $300,000 to improve the relocation areas.

Received more than $630,000 for reimbursement of Kinzua litigation costs and cemetery relocation.

Carried out a housing program for 120 homes, which was directly aided from the rehabilitation funds to the extent of $1.8 million

Established an educational foundation to provide scholarships from a $1.8 million fund.

Constructed two community buildings which house offices, council chambers, gymnasiums, multipurpose rooms, dining facilities a~ a cost of $1.2 million.

Allotted $2 million for the development of a 55-acre industrial park. The first plant, operated by the First Seneca Corp., to sew pillows and decorative items, is already in operation.

Created plans for a tourism and recreational development, subject to the findings of a feasibility study to be completed in October, which would involve creation of a corporation to lease tribal land and borrow up to $5.5 million from uncommitted rehabilitation funds.