Media Contact: Information Service
For Immediate Release: December 13, 1954
Print PDF

The Bureau of Indian Affairs today made public an exchange of letters between Commissioner Glenn L. Emmons and Mr. Reuben Olson, director of public relations, Anselm Forum, Inc., Gary, Indiana.

The correspondence deals with basic questions of Indian affairs policy on which there has been widespread public misunderstanding. The text of the two letters follows:

ANSELM FORUM INC. Gary, Indiana

Bureau of Indian Affairs November 1, 1954

Washington, D. C.

Gentlemen: We are greatly disturbed over the disclosure that it is evident to some that a motive for the intended transfer of the Indian Affairs Bureau is a mercenary one.

Can you inform us as to the validity of the fear that liquidation of the Bureau is desired so that Indian's land can be bought up for a song? And that uranium deposits are expected to be found in these disposed of lands?

Anything we can do in behalf of justice for the Indian please command us.

Very sincerely yours,

(Sgd) Reuben Olson

Director Public Relations

4456 Jackson St.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Washington 25, D. C.

December 10, 1954

Mr. Reuben Olson
Director Public Relations
4456 Jackson Street
Gary, Indiana

Dear Mr. Olson:

Reference is made to your letter of November 1, 1954, requesting our views on a reported fear that the

“liquidation” of the Bureau of Indian Affairs is desired so that Indian land may be "bought up for a song" and that lands to be disposed of contain uranium deposits.

I am afraid that there is a widespread lack of informed public opinion about present Indian policy and I am, therefore, more them happy to comment on some of the assertions and assumptions in your letter. It has for many years been the principal end and aim of Indian administration to admit the Indian into the enjoyment of full citizenship. To bring his economic, social and political life up to the level of American standards and to relieve him of all special Federal supervision and restrictions have also been leading objectives of Indian administration. It follows that, as these objectives are achieved, this Bureau would progressively retire from the operation of special services for, and the exercise of special guardianship over, Indians.

We would strongly oppose any proposal brought before the Congress for an abrupt termination of Federal guardianship over the tribes with the object of liquidating this Bureau. An essential fact about the American Indian tribes is the diversity in their background and their present readiness for complete or partial readjustment of their relations to the Federal government. Nany tribes have reached such a degree of group and individual advancement that it is possible to take decisive steps towards the termination of Federal supervision and the removal of restrictions and controls over their lands.. Throughout the country it is not generally appreciated to what extent certain tribes have developed to the point of being completely capable of managing their own affairs.

The 83rd Congress, recognizing this fact, enacted six "terminal" bills, namely, for the Klamath Tribe of Oregon, the Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin, four small Paiute groups in Utah, the Ute Tribe of Utah, a group of tribes in Western Oregon, and a small remnant group in Texas. The periods for carrying out the termination programs of these tribes range from two to seven years. In one case, that of the Ute Tribe of Utah, only a portion of the tribe, the mixed-bloods, are to be terminated, while the full-bloods are given an unspecified period in which to carry out a development program under which to achieve self-support and independence, with the active help of the Federal government. Prior to the introduction into the Congress of legislation affecting these tribes, careful field studies were conducted and extensive consultations with the Indians were carried out. In view of this approach, we cannot understand how it would be possible to characterize these terminal bills as a calculated conspiracy to deprive the Indians of their lands or the Indians' mineral rights.

As a part of this general policy, this administration has actually sought, with considerable success, to accelerate the transfer of Indian children from special Indian Bureau schools to regular public schools. Here there is a distinct loss of Indian Bureau operation but a heightened increase in educational service to Indians. Similarly, the 83rd Congress enacted a law providing for the transfer of the Indian Bureau health program to the U. S. Public Health Service. Again, there is a gain for the Indians, but a diminishment of Bureau organization. Such deliberate steps are strictly in accordance with the generally accepted objective of improving services to Indians through normal or established arrangements. The "liquidation" of this Bureau is a secondary result, not a primary purpose.

When the above mentioned terminal bills were before the Congress, there was criticism on the score of exposing minerals to alienation in only one case, namely, the four small Paiute tribes in Utah. We immediately supported an amendment, which was incorporated into the bill, under which the Secretary of the Interior is required to appoint one or more trustees for management of such rights for a period of not less than ten years. It is confidently believed that if any minerals or oil and gas should be discovered in the future on the lands of these four groups, sufficient safeguard has been erected to prevent any

spoliation.

Certatn1y it cannot be truthfully charged that these forward looking steps, aimed at bringing the Indian people into the main stream of American life, are for the purpose of exposing their lands to alienation to whites at premium prices. On the basis on which our fundarnenta1 approach is being made, it is not foreseen that there will be disadvantageous alienation of land.

Your interest in writing is appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

(signed) GLENN L. EMMONS
Commissioner