Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Commissioner of Indian Affairs Glenn L. Emmons announced today that he has asked the Solicitor1s Office of the Department of the Interior for advice on questions of law involved in a proposed 25-year oil and gas development contract between the Navajo Indian Tribe and the Delhi-Taylor Oil Corporation of Dallas, Texas.

The proposed contract, which covers about 5,000,000 acres or nearly a third of the entire Navajo Reservation in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, was recently submitted to Commissioner Emmons by Chairman Paul Jones of the Navajo Tribal Council.

In submitting the matter to the Department's legal staff, Commissioner Emmons raised two questions. The first is whether the contract could be approved under Section 5 of the Navajo Rehabilitation Act of 1950, which is the statutory authorization cited in the document itself. If the answer to this question is negative, the second question raised is whether it could be approved under the Tribal Leasing Act of 1938 which requires competitive bidding for oil and gas leases on Indian tribal lands.

If it is decided that the proposed contract can be approved under authority of existing law, then the Commissioner, in accordance with his responsibilities as trustee for Indian lands, will have to determine administratively whether it is in the best interests of the Navajo Indians to approve it. This decision, of course, will not be made until the legal questions have first been resolved.