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A two-year extension of the Interior Department's authority to lease lands on the Colorado River Indian Reservation in western Arizona would benefit the Indians, the Federal Government and the economy of Yuma County, Arizona, Assistant Secretary Roger C. Ernst said today in announcing the Department's support of S. 2161.

The bill would amend the Colorado River Leasing Act of 1955 and would provide such an extension beyond the present August 14, 1957, expiration date.

In clarifying the Department's position, Mr. Ernst pointed out that when the Colorado River Leasing Act of 1955 was enacted, it was anticipated that a controversy over the ownership of the reservation would be settled either by the Indian Claims Commission or by legislation during the succeeding two years. The dispute, however, has not yet been settled and probably will not be before the end of the current year.

Under these circumstances, Mr. Ernst said, a continuation of the leasing authority is needed and desirable.

The Department is now studying proposals recently submitted for agricultural development leasing of as much as 65,000 acres on the reservation. Execution of such development leases, said Mr. Ernst, will obviously benefit the Indians eventually determined to be owners of the land and will also relieve the Government of the need for making large expenditures of Federal funds for development.

Yuma County's economy will be strengthened greatly by the additional jobs and crop processing facilities created by the reservation's expanded potential, Mr. Ernst said.