



1-11-1954

Letter from John Hart to Orme Lewis Regarding Trusteeship, January 11, 1954

John B. Hart

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/burdick-papers>

Recommended Citation

Hart, John B., "Letter from John Hart to Orme Lewis Regarding Trusteeship, January 11, 1954" (1954).
Usher Burdick Papers. 13.
<https://commons.und.edu/burdick-papers/13>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections at UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Usher Burdick Papers by an authorized administrator of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact und.common@library.und.edu.

North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission

Gov. Norman Brunsdale, Chairman, Bismarck
Carlyle D. Onsrud, Secretary, Bismarck
Math Dahl, Bismarck
M. F. Peterson, Bismarck
R. O. Saxvik, M. D., Bismarck



John B. Hart, Executive Director
ROLLA, NORTH DAKOTA

Joseph Wicks, County Commissioner, Cannon Ball
Jacob Heihn, County Commissioner, Beulah
Joseph J. Blonigen, County Commissioner, Douglas
Math Baseflug, County Commissioner, Richardton
A. C. Berg, County Commissioner, Maddock
L. A. Powell, County Commissioner, Alexander
Fritz Borgeson, County Commissioner, Sheyenne
Clarence Bye, County Commissioner, Dunseith

January 11, 1954

Honorable Orme Lewis
Assistant Secretary of Interior
Department of the Interior
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. Lewis:

Under House Concurrent Resolution 108, the Secretary of Interior is required to report to Congress not later than January 1, 1954, his recommendations for legislation terminating Federal supervision over certain Indians. Included in the group covered is the Turtle Mountain band of Chippewa Indians in North Dakota. I have not had the opportunity of reading the legislation recommended by the Secretary. I assume it will be similar to the rough draft made available to this office and to the Turtle Mountain Indians on October 19, 1953. We know you are interested in our position.

There is no argument about the desirability of abolishing the reservations, every last one of them.

There is no argument about the desirability of terminating the Federal trusteeship over Indians, provided the Congress first acts to provide a solution for the really basic problem.

But to do either of these things now and hurriedly, without tackling the real problem, is not putting first things first.

There is only one big question that exists in Indian affairs today. It is not "emancipation". It is not abolishing reservations. It is not immediate termination of Indian trusteeship. What is required is simply this: that the government meet squarely its obligation to reimburse state and local agencies for its due share of the cost of the financial burden Congress will be imposing upon them; that all Indians everywhere should be served by the same agencies that operate to meet the needs of non-Indians for health, welfare, law enforcement, education, et cetera.

January 11, 1954

This can be accomplished by arrangement, acceptable to the local governments concerned, with adequate financial guarantees by which these agencies will be reimbursed properly and sufficiently for the extra burden put upon them by reason of their acceptance of the additional load involved, until the assimilation of the Indian people is complete. There is no argument of the necessity of adequate reimbursement. Any other course means bankruptcy to the local governments concerned or probably the complete abandonment of the Indians on a pattern set by Congress.

There is no need at this moment to worry about the reservation as such. The reservations will take care of themselves.

There is no need at this moment to be too eager to terminate the Federal trusteeship on any particular reservation. The trusteeship will end of itself as soon as the basic requirement is met. The trusteeship in fact will progressively fade away.

These two things--the reservations and the trusteeships--are superficial to the one important matter before Congress, the Department of the Interior, and the American people.

This one thing, which is a new and much needed change in policy, is that the Congress should require the Secretary of Interior to properly utilize present laws and, where needed, set up immediately other legal provisions by which existing state and local community service agencies will provide these necessary services for Indians, the same as these agencies presently serve non-Indians. At the same time, Congress and the Secretary of Interior should, under existing laws, set aside such portions of the present appropriations to the Bureau of Indian Affairs as may be necessary to provide an adequate supply of funds with which to reimburse the state and local levels of government.

To do this job, it is not going to cost the government any more than it does right now. In fact, it will cost less and at the same time do a better job for our Indians. The inherent evils of a segregated service will dissolve in a nation of equal citizens with equal responsibilities.

If this happens the Indian problem will terminate under its own momentum. Emancipation will gradually become a reality and citizenship will become a fact, not merely an act of Congress. Indian reservations will become history. No longer will we have American Ghettos.

Sincerely,

John B. Hart
Executive Director