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Statement by Representative Burdick on Indian Claims, Undated

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INDIAN CLAIMS

That the Indians of the United States have just claims against the Government for millions of dollars, no informed person denies. For one hundred and fifty years we have made solemn treaties with the Indians, in which the Indians gave up title to their lands on the express promise of payment by the Government. Time has worn away year after year and still the Indians have not been paid. A few examples of this situation can be found in North Dakota.

In 1868 we made a treaty with the Sioux at Fort Rice in which the Indians gave up title to their lands east of the Missouri River, except actual reservation lands, and in return it was agreed that the Black Hills and all country west of the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains was to be and remain Indian Country where the Indian could live unmolested.

In 1874, General Custer's expedition to the Black Hills established definitely that there was gold in the Black Hills. This information caused a grand stampede to the Black Hills and thousands of prospectors swarmed into the Hills to chase the rainbow of gold. That the country was Sioux Country as established in the treaty of 1868, no one denied--not even the Government. The gold was taken and finally the land was taken in violation of the treaty, and to this day the Sioux have not been paid a dime for their gold or a nickel for their land. The claim is still pending.

The Sioux Sisseton-Wahpeton Claim, the Fort Berthold Indian Claim, and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewas Claim, all present the same situation.

Since I have been in Congress, I have given attention to these just claims and have tried to have jurisdictional bills passed to permit these claims to be heard and settled, and each time the Court of Claims has in one way or another avoided a head-on decision in the matter. Four years ago I presented or caused to be presented to the two major parties a plank in respect to settling all Indian Claims. The Republicans adopted the plank and the Democrats adopted one that went further than the one I presented. Yet **neither** party has made any move to redeem these pledges. I took the pledges seriously and introduced a Claims Commission Bill which, if adopted, would be the means of gathering up all these claims in a period of five years and settling them for good on the ground of justice and equity. But the bill will not be passed by this Congress. If I am returned to the House I will continue this drive to do justice, not only to the Indians of North Dakota but to all Indians in the United States.

Usher L. Burdick