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## Letter from Representative Burdick to Hal Davies Regarding History of the Garrison Dam, January 14, 1952

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January 11, 1952.

Mr. Hal Davies,  
Minot, North Dakota.

Dear Davies:

I am enclosing herewith a Brief I presented to the Committee here in Congress, which will give you a clear picture of the history back of the building of the Garrison Dam.

You will note that the Army Engineers never acquired any authority to construct a dam with a water pool of over 17 million-acre feet. Such a pool would have an elevation of about 1,830 feet. Had they stopped there, they would not have taken all this extra land of 90,000 acres. If there was any good public reason why this should be taken, Congress should authorize it and not permit these engineers to exercise their own judgment.

There were four purposes outlined in the original authority: Flood Control, Navigation, Power Development, and Irrigation.

As to Flood Control, the facts are that the great floods lower down the Missouri-Mississippi system occur at a time when the upper Missouri is frozen solid. Even this last flood in Kansas City received none of the damaging waters from the upper Missouri. It was the Kaw that overflowed.

On Navigation, the fact is that all navigation by water, so far as North Dakota and Montana are concerned, is destroyed by these dams. It is claimed by the Engineers that they want to provide navigation from Sioux City to the Mississippi but, if you will look at a map, you will find that the railroad systems make this connection completely and that, if navigation enters competition with the railroads, the Inter-State Commerce Commission will have to fix the rates to prevent the railroads from going out of business on this short haul. We cannot destroy railroads with impunity.

Besides this a nine-foot channel, 300 feet wide, will take all the water available in the Upper Missouri, even when collected behind dams, and will make irrigation impossible.



H. D. #2,

Power Development was another purpose but, since this dam was planned, we have discovered that steam plants scattered through the coal fields can produce more and cheaper electricity when the cost of the dam is taken into consideration. The private plant of the power company in Mercer County proves this completely, and the government experiment at or near Velva will further demonstrate the superiority of steam-produced electricity.

Irrigation was another feature but, when the Missouri-Valley above the dam is totally destroyed and the valley below the dams are cut by a great number of rises of water, the lands below are also destroyed. At Williston, in the early days, we used to have one June rise every year and some cutting of banks took place, but now, there is a June rise every time the gates are opened at Fort Peck. Last year there were 12 such June rises. The result has been that lands have been inundated to an alarming degree. The power plant at the Buford-Frenton Project will soon be washed away by the river unless action is promptly taken to rip-rap the banks. Many irrigation owners have already been washed out.

When we look over all these proposed benefits, we discover absolutely that the whole plan could be carried out with a lower pool and the terrific damage stayed.

The reason why the Engineers are so determined to have an extra 20 feet of water is to take water out of the dam to divert to Devils Lake while the Missouri-Souris program does the same thing, without material damage. The Missouri-Souris does not take water out of Fort Peck dam but below it and does not, therefore, interfere with the power capacity at the dam.

At Garrison the water is to be taken out of the dam; hence, there will be no more power developed at Garrison with an 1850 foot level than with an 1830 foot level.

There is no question that the Army Engineers are making every effort possible to sabotage the Missouri-Souris project. There is great jealousy existing between the Army Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation. (But if you will look at the Brief, you will find that the Army Engineers signed the agreement to let the Bureau handle irrigation, but still the Army is planning irrigation in spite of that signed agreement.)

You will find that there is nothing wrong with the lands which have been reported to be unfit for irrigation in the Missouri-Souris project. It is part of a conspiracy to prevent the Missouri-Souris project.

What we intend now is this: Working with the Great Northern Railway, we propose to enjoin the Engineers from exceeding their



H. D. #3.

authority and to that end we are working on that matter right now. We do not have to sue the U. S. government for, when Army Engineers exceed their authority, they become personally responsible and not the government.

Trusting that this will assist you in making up a picture of the entire situation, I am

Sincerely,

Enc.

Usher L. Burdick, M. C.