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Letter from Glenn Emmons to Representative Burdick Regarding US Senate Bill 2151, March 14, 1956

Glenn Emmons

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IN REPLY REFER TO:
Tribal Affairs
2369-56

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

MAR 14 1956

Hon. Usher L. Burdick
House of Representatives
Washington 25, D. C.

My dear Mr. Burdick:

I have your letter of February 15 regarding a letter you received from another member of the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation in which he states the people on the reservation are opposed to S. 2151 and voted on this bill which was rejected by a vote of 37 to 0. Your correspondent listed five reasons why the people oppose the proposed legislation. You ask whether, in our opinion, the reasons given in opposition to S. 2151 are valid ones.

We have been aware that certain members of the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation are opposed to the proposed legislation. They prefer a direct per capita payment without any type of plan for the use of the funds. It has been our experience in the past that when direct per capita payments were authorized, some heads of families used the combined funds of the family to improve their economic status. The same is true with regard to some individual members of the tribes. However, a great many did not and in many instances became relief clients.

It should be pointed out that individual tribal members who owned lands which were inundated as the result of the construction of the Garrison Dam have long since received payment for their losses. Therefore, the present balance of the funds involved in S. 2151 represents a capital asset belonging to the tribes as a whole and not to individual members. The proposed bill, if enacted into law, would protect the interests of all members of the tribes and would also afford the utilization of the remaining funds in the United States Treasury to the best possible advantage. We do not believe there will be any unreasonable delay in developing, with the individuals or the family group as the case may be, suitable plans which will be adapted to each family unit or individual situation. For those persons who are competent to handle their own affairs, there should be no delay at all.

The Secretary of the Interior under the act of September 27, 1950, does not have complete authority to distribute per capita funds on deposit in the United States Treasury to the credit of the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation. That act authorizes the expenditure of tribal funds for any purpose which may be authorized by the governing body of the tribes and approved by the Secretary. However, since the funds involved represent a capital asset belonging to the tribe as a whole, I would be obliged to recommend to the Secretary that any per capita distribution of funds still be disbursed in accordance with a plan which would afford protection of the funds of minors and persons non compos mentis and assist the adult members of the tribes in deriving the best possible use of the remaining funds.

Sincerely yours,

(S60) GLENN L. EMMONS

Commissioner