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Draft of Statement by Representative Burdick on Distribution of Potatoes to North Dakota Indians, January 22

Usher Burdick

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RELEASE:

MONDAY, Jan. 22 - NOON

Publications

STATEMENT BY Usher L. BURDICK ^{ON} ~~REPORTS~~ DISTRIBUTION
OF POTATOES TO N. D. INDIANS

~~Congressman Usher L. Burdick of North Dakota yesterday~~ ^{I have just been by the Indian Bureau} was informed that a distribution of surplus government foods has been made to Indians. / my state

Two carloads of potatoes were sent to the Standing Rock Agency; one carload to the Wahpeton School; six and a half carloads of potatoes, 8,000 pounds of cheese and 23,000 pounds of butter were allocated to the Turtle Mountain-Fort Totten Agency. Superintendent ^{C. H. J.} Beitzel has arranged for heated storage for the potatoes at Belcourt, and these and the other commodities will be distributed to individual families as the need arises.

There was some reluctance on the part of the Indian Bureau in Washington to push this project, especially as to the Turtle Mountain-Fort Totten Agency. ~~This was explained on the ground~~ ^(The Bureau contends) that there is a wide-spread attitude of "disturbing" dependency and "demand" among many of the Indians, and it was apparently felt that supplying them with the government surplus food would not make for good morale, self-sufficiency, or the desire to help themselves and become self-supporting; that some of them are receiving unemployment compensation and others are presently employed; also, that the Bureau was not sure the Indians wanted the potatoes or would use them.

To this I can only ^{ask} ~~say~~ that in the case of aged Indians, who live on a mere pittance, will feeding ~~them~~ spoil them for becoming good, active, alert citizens? We can get all kinds of potatoes for cattle by merely going to the Agriculture local offices and signing up for them. Would the feeding of potatoes to cattle have the same effect—that of spoiling them for rustling

for themselves? As a matter of human philosophy is it better to feed cattle than Indians? That has been the attitude of the Government in the past — but is it too late to change?

They say they are not sure that

~~Do~~ the Indians want potatoes? Does anyone who is hungry want potatoes?

I suppose the government red-tape would demand that we fill the reservation full of investigators and have each Indian sign a document when he

~~WANTED~~
~~wanted~~

potatoes. If the giving of potatoes to Indians would insure a lot of jobs for the Indian Bureau to hand out, I am sure the Indians would get the potatoes.

Last year the Indians on the Turtle Mountain-Fort Totten Reservation were allotted \$126,614. This year the allotment was cut to \$62,300. There are 1368 families on the reservation. This means that each family this year will receive \$45.54 in welfare aid from the government, or, figuring five to a family, that each person would receive \$9.10. A letter from Mr. John B. Hart, Executive Director of the North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission, says, in part:

"Because of the gross inadequateness of the resources of the Turtle Mountain-Fort Totten band, which is well-known, it is hard to explain why the Indian Bureau allotted to these 1368 families only \$62,000....."

In such an instance, the attitude of the government, in regard to caring for these wards of the nation, who, after all, are our first citizens, is not one to be highly commended, nor indeed explained in the light of human obligation and consideration.

~~Another~~ project for the Indians is an effort to get the waste lignite coal from the excavations at the Garrison Dam distributed to the Indian Agencies to be used for cooking and heating purposes. The Area Director, Mr. Warren

Spaulding, says that he is very much in favor of getting this coal for the Indians if further investigation shows that it can be used to advantage for cooking and heating purposes. He further says that the details of having it picked up, loaded and distributed can easily be worked out.