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Letter from R.J. Doebler to Senator Langer Regarding Medical Care for Indians of the Fort Berthold and Turtle Mountain Reservations, February 19, 1948

R.J. Doebler

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Fidelity Phenix
Fire Insurance Company
of New York

135 South La Salle Street
Chicago Illinois

February 19, 1948

Honorable William Langer
United States Senate
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Langer:

Thanks for yours of February 12th enclosing S.B. 1984 which I trust will be passed without any stalling in Congress. If we are to play Santa Claus on this Marshall Plan I think charity should begin right at home with our Indians. You asked me to feel free to write whenever matters come up which I think you can be of some assistance. Well there has. In my January 10, 1948 letter I stated that I had been a member of the Ward County Welfare Board for a number of years and that on numerous occasions the Board took care of the needy Indians who had come in to Minot during the war to work as common laborers. Of course, after Japan surrendered and the white common labor returned, the Indians were out of work.

At the time these Indians had left the Reservation I raised the question with the Board as to just what would happen after the war as to whether or not they had gained a residence in Ward County after being here one year or whether they were eligible to return to their respective Reservations. Most of them came from the Fort Berthold and the Turtle Mountain Agency.

The Indians get sick and need operations as well as the whites and when Roosevelt was "priming the pump", a hospital was built at the Turtle Mountain Agency and I believe also down at Nishu on the Fort Berthold.

From various rumors I have heard the Indians have been applying for medical aid and are refusing to return to the Reservation, particularly those enrolled in the Turtle Mountain Agency. I have been told that the excuse they make is that they do not get adequate care at that hospital and that the doctor there is a foreigner and they have no confidence in him and in fact, I have been told that they would rather go without medical treatment than to return to that Reservation hospital. Also, so the rumor goes, that the

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diagnosis made, say for instance, by a Minot physician and that of the doctor in charge of the hospital are never the same.

In a good many instances requests for medical attentions are emergencies and the patient is not physically well enough to be transported that distance. From the information I have had from time to time it all adds up that the Indians want no part of the doctor at the Turtle Mountain Agency and I would suggest that an investigation be made as to whether or not the Indians are right. If they are right then there should be a change made and a competent man put in charge. If they are wrong, then that's the end of that. I do recall, however, several years ago that investigations had been made of various Veterans hospitals and the reports were anything but good as to the treatment the patients were receiving. About a year ago I talked with a young veterans who had been a patient at the St. Cloud Veterans Administration hospital and he told me that the personnel was packed with foreigners that had been run out of Europe and that thing is were anything but pleasant. I know as well as you do that any practitioner who graduated from any of our universities can make more money these days than he can working for the Government in these various hospitals as the salary is quite low from the information I have received.

Ward County recognizes that the Indians, regardless of residence, are eligible for medical care at a Reservation hospital providing they return to the Reservation and in such cases where they absolutely refuse to return or, are unable on account of their physical condition, they have been taken care of here but, Ward County is unable to take care of all of these Indians without being reimbursed by either the Federal Government or the county from which they come.

If the information I have received is correct I understand that the hospital at Nishu has been closed so the Indians from the Fort Berthold go to Bismarck or come to Minot.

We have had an extremely long and cold winter and there has been very little common labor work for the Indians. I understand that the Red Cross together with what Federal funds has come in plus what the various Welfare Boards have done has somewhat relieved the ~~condition~~ but not insolar as the medical situation at the Turtle Mountain Agency is concerned. I wish, therefore, that you would use your influence in having an immediate investigation made of this situation of the Turtle Mountain Agency and if the various reports I have had are confirmed there should be some changes made. I know that you are busy with other problems but I trust you will find time to start the ball rolling on this.

With best wishes I am

Sincerely yours,

R. J. Doebler