

Senate Group To Ponder Indian Land Sale Report

WASHINGTON (AP) — A mass report on the sale of Indian land awaits study by the Senate Interior Committee after Congress convenes next month.

The 838-page document, entitled "Indian Land Transactions," was printed by the government at the request of Sen. James E. Murray (D-Mont.), committee chairman. Murray has said something should be done to slow the rate at which the American Indian is losing his land.

The book, intended to help the committee decide whether legislation is needed, contains what may be the most detailed study ever made of Indian land transactions. It contains, among other things, the answers to questionnaires on land sales from 52 Indian agency offices and several tribal organizations. The questionnaires were sent out last spring on Murray's orders.

The federal Bureau of Indian Affairs concedes there has been an increase in the sales of land held by the government in trust for individual Indian owners.

It says, however, there has been an increase — not a decrease — in the acreage of land held in trust for Indian tribes.

Indian Affairs Commissioner Glenn L. Emmons said there has been "widespread public concern and substantial public misunderstanding" about the bureau's policy governing sales of Indian land. More than a million acres have been added to tribal holdings since 1953, he said.

The additions resulted from tribal purchases approved by the Interior Department or from legislation sponsored or endorsed by the department, he added.

Federal policy on Indian trust land in the past few years, Emmons said, "is based on a full recognition of the individual Indian property rights which are unquestionably involved."

The government gave the land to the Indians and they have a "valid property right, though under trust, fully equivalent... to that enjoyed by any other American property owner," Emmons said.

He contrasted this situation with conditions in Russia where individuals cannot own or sell land. "At the same time, however," he said, "we are also fully aware of our trust responsibilities for tribal property and we recognize that many of the tribal organizations have a legitimate and valid interest in acquiring individual Indian properties that may be offered for sale."

"The problem, in essence, has been to work out a method for permitting the fullest possible development of sound tribal land acquisition plans without violating the property rights and interest of the individual tribal members," Emmons said his bureau authorizes sale of land only when, "after careful examination of the circumstances... a sale appears to be clearly justified in the light of his (the owner's) long-range best interests."

Tribal groups always are given first opportunity to negotiate with individuals selling their lands, Emmons said. Murray said individual trust lands decreased by 3,307,217 acres in the 10-year period 1948-57, while tribal trust land increased by 1,213,307 acres. Calling the decrease "alarm-

ing," Murray said it "raises a question as to whether the Indian bureau has exercised its authority wisely in granting so many applications."

"Has the bureau fully considered the possible adverse effects on both the tribe and individuals in each case?" the Senator asked.

Murray said the analysis shows field officials and employees of the Indian bureau "are diligently striving to assist the Indians but are operating under somewhat of a handicap for lack of more specific direction from the area and central offices."

He said the committee should consider recommending more specific regulations covering Indian land sales.

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