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Letter from the Secretary of War, on the subject of the expenses of making the disbursements of the Indian Department

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LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

ON THE

Subject of the expenses of making the disbursements of the Indian Department.

JANUARY 7, 1839.

Submitted by Mr. WHITE, and referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs.

JANUARY 18, 1839.

Ordered to be printed, to accompany Senate bill No. 207.

WAR DEPARTMENT, *December 15, 1838.*

SIR: I have the honor to submit the accompanying report and estimate of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, on the subject of the expenses of making the disbursements of that department, for the consideration and action of the Committee on Indian Affairs.

Very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

J. R. POINSETT.

HON. HUGH L. WHITE,

Chairman Committee on Indian Affairs, Senate.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Office Indian Affairs, December 12, 1838.

SIR: Several officers of the army have been heretofore employed as disbursing agents of this office, but the act of July 5th last, for increasing the military establishment of the United States, prohibits officers of the line from being so engaged after 5th July next, if any interference with the performance of their military duties proper should be thereby occasioned. This may be regarded as a general exclusion of them from the Indian service. Officers of the staff of the army are not named, but their services are required elsewhere. Heretofore there has been no appropriation for the compensation of principal agents of this class, because those employed were under pay in the army. Their travelling expenses were paid out of the fund for contingencies and transportation, as well as the allowance made to assistant disbursing agents.

Now that persons in civil life must be designated for the above duty, an appropriation to meet their compensation or salaries is necessary. The civil agent lately appointed to disburse at Detroit, was informed he would receive \$6 per day and his expenses. This is a good occasion for suggesting that the measure of compensation be changed entirely, and I would respectfully recommend that the per diem and expenses, as to these permanent disbursing agents, be abolished, and that in lieu thereof, and of all charges, there be substituted fixed salaries. The disbursements are and will be necessarily large, and it is of the greatest importance to have in this branch of the service men of probity and ability. They can only be had for such compensation as will afford something over a decent subsistence. It is, in my opinion, bad economy in the end to make salaries so small as to place before men the temptation to increase their means by improper acts. I therefore think that \$2,500 for principal disbursing agents, and \$2,000 for assistants, would probably insure capacity and fidelity. These sums may appear high, but they are not materially different from those heretofore allowed in another form. What I desire particularly is, to have fixed allowances.

There are three principal disbursing agencies, viz: at Detroit, St. Louis, and Little Rock, at each of which two assistant agents have been employed permanently, with an occasional additional agent for special services. The two assistants at Little Rock ought to be continued until the heavy treaty disbursements are made, but I think one permanent assistant agent, at each of the first two points, is all that the public service would require, provided there was given by the law contemplated to the principal disbursing agent, under the direction of the War Department, the power to appoint an occasional and temporary agent, as the public exigencies would call for its exercise. The latter description of officers would necessarily be paid a per diem and travelling expenses, as it cannot be known how long they would be employed, nor when, nor how many would be necessary.

I submit estimates founded on the present plan of payment, as well as on the foregoing basis, by which it will be seen that \$20,000 annually are deemed necessary: \$15,500 for the salaries of the principal and permanent assistant disbursing agents, and the remaining \$4,500 for compensating those occasionally employed in the business season, say six months in twelve. If Congress should prefer the present mode of paying these officers, the sum of \$20,000, as will be seen, is supposed to be large enough for the purpose. In either case there should be added \$1,500 for the contingencies of all the agencies, at \$500 each. Nothing is said of clerk hire, which has been allowed hitherto, because it is supposed the assistants can very well perform this duty during six months in the year, when they are not more actively engaged, and at other times the principals can supply themselves as far as may be necessary with aid from their temporary agents, or, if required, by the occasional and brief employment of assistance.

I would further suggest that the security to be given for the performance of duty be regulated by law. It seems to me that each of the principal disbursing agents should execute a bond, with two or more sureties, (to be approved by the nearest United States judge,) in the sum of \$50,000, conditioned for the faithful application of all moneys confided to him, and the rendering and settling of all accounts thereof, at such times and under such regulations and prescriptions as are, or may be, from time to time established and imposed by the War Department, and generally to do and per-

form all and every duty incident and belonging to his office. The like bond, in the sum of \$40,000, with two or more sureties, to be approved as before, to be given by each of the permanent assistant agents. No act of any principal or assistant disbursing agent to be valid until he shall have given the bond as above, and taken an oath well and faithfully to perform the duties of his office.

Very respectfully, your most obedient servant,
T. HARTLEY CRAWFORD.

Hon. JOEL R. POINSETT,
Secretary of War.

Estimate of the sums that will be required to defray the expense of making the disbursements for the Indian Department.

For the district of Detroit, as defined in the 26th paragraph of the Revised Regulations No. 3 :

One principal disbursing agent, at \$6 per day	-	-	\$2,190 00
Estimated travelling expenses, say 120 days, at \$2 per day	-	-	240 00
One assistant disbursing agent, at \$5 per day	-	-	1,825 00
Travelling expenses, 150 days, at \$2 per day	-	-	300 00
One occasional assistant, say six months, at \$5 per day	-	-	912 50
Travelling expenses, same time, at \$2 per day	-	-	300 00

5,757 50

For the district of St. Louis, same as above	-	-	5,757 50
For the district of Little Rock, one principal disbursing agent, at \$6 per day, travelling expenses as before	-	-	2,430 00
Two assistants, at \$5 per day, and expenses as before	-	-	4,250 00

18,195 00

Three principal disbursing agents, at \$2,500	-	-	\$7,500 00
Four assistant disbursing agents, at \$2,000	-	-	8,000 00
Occasional assistants	-	-	4,500 00

20,000 00