

2-12-1891

Letter from the Acting Secretary of the Interior,
transmitting a recommendation of the
Commissioner of Indian Affairs for an
appropriation to aid negotiations with the Navajo
Indians

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/indianserialset>

 Part of the [Indian and Aboriginal Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

S. Exec. Doc. No. 52, 51st Cong., 2nd Sess. (1891)

This Senate Executive Document is brought to you for free and open access by University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899 by an authorized administrator of University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact darinfox@ou.edu.

L E T T E R

FROM

THE ACTING SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR,

TRANSMITTING

A recommendation of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for an appropriation to aid negotiations with the Navajo Indians.

FEBRUARY 12, 1891.—Referred to the Committee on Appropriations and ordered to be printed.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, February 11, 1891.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit herewith copy of a letter of 9th instant from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, inclosing a draft of an item which he recommends be inserted in the pending Indian appropriation bill:

To enable the Secretary of the Interior to negotiate with the Navajo tribe of Indians in New Mexico and Arizona, for such modification of the existing treaty with said Indians and such change of their reservation boundaries as may be deemed desirable by said Indians and the Secretary of the Interior, \$5,000, or so much thereof as may be necessary, to be immediately available, any agreement made to be ratified by Congress before going into effect.

I concur in the Commissioner's recommendation, and respectfully submit the matter with the request that it may receive the consideration of Congress at its present session.

Very respectfully,

GEO. CHANDLER,
Acting Secretary.

The PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,
Washington, February 9, 1891.

SIR: For more than 2 years rumors have been rife of the existence of rich gold and silver deposits in the Carizo Mountains, within the Navajo Indian Reservation, in New Mexico and Arizona, and it appears now to be the settled belief of the people in that part of the country that there is immense mineral wealth in said mountains, equal to, if not surpassing, anything that has hitherto been discovered in the United States. That visits have been made surreptitiously to that region is quite certain, and once, in the spring of 1890, the military was called

upon by the resident agent to remove a party of prospectors from the reservation, and did remove a party of fifteen who were found locating claims at the foot of the mountains.

The reports made by these explorers appear to have confirmed the current stories, and there is much excitement, as appears from the newspapers of that locality. The Indians, jealous as they always are of their territorial rights, have been watching these movements with keen apprehension, and it is said that one life at least has already been sacrificed in the unlawful attempt to get a foothold in the mineral region.

On the occasion of a visit to the reservation in the spring of 1890, Hon. Herbert Welsh, secretary of the Indian Rights Association, of Philadelphia, called my attention to the condition of affairs there growing out of the prevailing belief in the existence of rich mineral deposits on the reservation, and the manifest determination on the part of the whites in the neighborhood to explore the same. He suggested that the matter should be promptly taken in hand and the consent of the Indians obtained to a scientific examination of the mineral region, to the end that if valuable discoveries were made, negotiations might be had with the Indians looking to some satisfactory arrangement for their development.

More recently my attention has been called to published statements in the local newspapers (Albuquerque, N. Mex., and Durango, Colo.) to the effect that a determined purpose exists to gain possession of the mines whether the Indian title shall be extinguished or not, and that the agent and the Government itself will be unable to resist the tide of prospectors that will pour in there as soon as it becomes generally known that rich gold deposits have been discovered in the Carizo Mountains. It is strongly urged in the interest of peace that the Indian title to the mineral district be speedily extinguished.

The Navajo Reservation embraces an area of about 8,200,000 acres, and is therefore considerably greater in extent than the State of Maryland. No accurate census of the tribe has ever been taken, but their number is variously estimated at from 14,000 to 20,000, about one-half of whom reside outside of the boundaries of the reservation, on the public lands.

Large as the reservation is, it is for the most part absolutely worthless for agricultural purposes. In the most favored localities in that part of the country irrigation is necessary to the cultivation of the soil, and experience has taught that irrigation anywhere on the reservation is most difficult and expensive. Indeed, if the Navajos were a strictly agricultural people, their reservation could not be made to produce enough for their support by any system of irrigation that could be adopted. They are not an agricultural people, however, but are essentially a pastoral people, depending almost entirely upon their sheep and goats. It is estimated that they own 1,000,000 of these and 250,000 horses. The sheep, which are their main dependence, are of an inferior grade. Attempts have been made to improve the quality and decrease the number to the end that less territory would be required for their support, but all such attempts have failed, for the reason that the higher grades do not thrive in that arid region, and so it is that thousands of the Indians, with their flocks, remain outside of the reservation. Their horses are mostly of an inferior class, Indian ponies. They are, nevertheless, tough and wiry, and capable of wonderful improvement. The proof of this is found in the fact that they have some large and handsome horses in their herds, the result of the

accidental introduction of a better strain. This office recently directed the agent to estimate for the purchase of three good stallions, to be given to the Navajos for the improvement of their stock.

Congress is making annual appropriations, gratuitously, of \$15,000 for the support and civilization of the Navajos and the construction of irrigating ditches on the reservation. The "support and civilization" money is expended in the purchase of farming implements, farm wagons, harness, clothing, medicines, etc., and for pay of employes, but no subsistence is furnished. The Navajos have no tribal funds to draw upon as many of the tribes have, and they are virtually self-supporting.

It would, I believe, be a good thing if the Navajos would relinquish a portion of their vast possessions upon reasonable terms. It is not essential to their prosperity that they should have a large fund in the Treasury for their support; indeed it would undoubtedly weaken in them the spirit of self-reliance and retard rather than promote their well-being; but if they had a fund drawing interest that would give them the means to construct and keep in repair reservoirs for the storage of water for their numerous flocks, to build more comfortable houses, and provide themselves with improved implements and better school facilities, it would not only relieve the Government of the burden, but greatly advance their prosperity and happiness.

However, leaving aside these considerations, in my estimation it is poor policy and decidedly selfish to keep vast areas of the public domain in a state of reservation for Indian purposes when entirely out of proportion to the number of Indians residing thereon, and especially so when it is reasonably certain that there are large and valuable mineral deposits thereon, which the Indians themselves are prohibited from mining, and which no outsider can lawfully remove or interfere with, no matter how much the country might be enriched by their proper development. It is probably true that the Navajo reservation, vast as it is and extending as it does into three Territories—New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah—is incapable of supporting the immense flocks and herds of the Navajos. This condition is due not to the lack of territory, but to the aridity and barrenness of the soil and the broken character of the country. It abounds in mesas, broken table-lands, and deep cañons, and in the interior are lofty mountains, with peaks rising to the height of 10,000 or 12,000 feet. All this furnishes further argument against keeping the reservation locked up in its entirety when the public interests seem to demand that the mineral portions be opened to the enterprising whites who are now awaiting such action.

The reservation has been extended time and again, presumably in the endeavor to find sufficient pasturage to enable the Navajos to keep all of their stock on the reservation and to protect the Indians against white intruders. The experiment of extending the reservation has signally failed to relieve the situation so far as providing ample grazing and water for the stock is concerned, and there are probably as many sheep and goats pastured outside of the reservation as there were before. Probably not one-third of the reservation, as at present existing, is fit even for sheep pasturage.

I am satisfied that the Navajos could part with the mountainous portion of their reservation, the northern central portion where the Carizo Mountains lie, without in the least damaging their prospects. On the contrary, I think it would prove beneficial to them in many ways, and if there is mineral there the country should have the benefit of it.

I omitted to say that Mr. Welsh, in writing from the Navajo Agency last spring, stated that he felt certain that the Indians would willingly consent to any proper arrangement with the Government looking to the development of the mines upon just and reasonable terms as to compensation, etc.

I have the honor to recommend that Congress be asked to authorize the appointment of a commission to negotiate with the Navijos for such modification of the existing treaty with said Indians and such change of their reservation as may be deemed desirable by said Indians and the Secretary of the Interior, and to appropriate the sum of \$5,000, or so much thereof as may be necessary, for that purpose, any agreement made to be ratified by Congress before going into effect.

Such a commission could go upon the reservation, investigate the situation, and if need be examine the mineral region, and in case of reasonable certainty of the existence of valuable mineral deposits, enter into negotiations with the Indians for the cession and relinquishment of such portions of their reservation, not agricultural and valuable chiefly for minerals, as might be deemed desirable to open to white occupation.

I have had prepared and herewith inclose a draft of an item which I think will meet the case, and would suggest that it be inserted in the pending Indian appropriation bill.

Two copies of this report are herewith inclosed.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

T. J. MORGAN,
Commissioner.

The SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

Item.

To enable the Secretary of the Interior to negotiate with the Navajo tribe of Indians in New Mexico and Arizona for such modification of the existing treaty with said Indians and such change of their reservation boundaries as may be deemed desirable by said Indians and the Secretary of the Interior, five thousand dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary, to be immediately available, any agreement made to be ratified by Congress before going into effect.