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Contract schools for Indians.

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CONTRACT SCHOOLS FOR INDIANS.

DECEMBER 13, 1894.—Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs and ordered to be printed.

L E T T E R

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR,

TRANSMITTING

A communication from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, submitting a report as to the propriety of discontinuing contract schools for Indians, required by the act of Congress approved August 15, 1894.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, December 13, 1894.

SIR: The act of Congress entitled "An act making appropriations for the current and contingent expenses of the Indian Department and fulfilling treaty stipulations with various Indian tribes, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1895, and for other purposes," approved August 15, 1894, contains the following provision:

Provided, That the Secretary of the Interior is hereby directed to inquire into and investigate the propriety of discontinuing contract schools, and whether, in his judgment, the same can be done without detriment to the education of Indian children; and that he submit to Congress at its next session the result of such investigation, including an estimate of the additional cost, if any, of substituting Government schools for contract schools, together with such recommendations as he may deem proper.

The matter was submitted to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and I inclose herewith a copy of his report, dated November 19, 1894.

My views upon this subject are set forth in my annual report to the President of the United States, from which I quote as follows:

The contract schools are now the subject of general discussion. I agree fully with those who oppose the use of public money for the support of sectarian schools. But this question should be considered practically. The schools have grown up. Money has been invested in their construction at a time when they were recognized as wise instrumentalities for the accomplishment of good. I do not think it proper to allow the intense feeling of opposition to sectarian education, which is showing itself all over the land, to induce the Department to disregard existing conditions. We need the schools now, or else we need a large appropriation to build schools to take their place.

It would scarcely be just to abolish them entirely—to abandon instantly a policy so long recognized. My own suggestion is that they should be decreased at the rate of not less than 20 per cent a year. Thus, in a few years more, they would cease to

exist, and during this time the Bureau would gradually be prepared to do without them, while they might gather strength to continue without Government aid. This is the policy which is now controlling the Department, and unless it is changed by legislation it will be continued. The decrease in the appropriation for the present fiscal year is 20 per cent.

It is possible that the plan of annual reduction can not be carried out to the full extent proposed, namely, 20 per cent each year. But in any event, within a few years, unless unforeseen obstacles arise, the substitution of Government for contract schools should take place.

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs estimates that the cost of substituting Government schools for contract schools would be approximately \$1,203,060, which estimate is, however, based upon the theory that all buildings would be erected within Indian reservations, thus avoiding the necessity of any expenditure for lands for school purposes.

Very respectfully,

HOKE SMITH, *Secretary.*

The SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,
Washington, November 19, 1894.

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge receipt of yours of the 5th instant, inviting my attention to the following provision in the Indian appropriation act of August 15 last, in relation to the expenditure of moneys for school purposes, viz,

Provided, That the Secretary of the Interior is hereby directed to inquire into and investigate the propriety of discontinuing contract schools, and whether, in his judgment, the same can be done without detriment to the education of Indian children; and that he submit to Congress at its next session the result of such investigation, including an estimate of the additional cost, if any, of substituting Government schools for contract schools. * * * (Public No. 197, p. 29.)

and asking to be informed what steps, if any, have been taken by this office to carry out this provision of Congress, and to have such facts reported in detail with all necessary data bearing on the subject as will enable the Department to comply with the requirement of the law referred to.

In reply, I beg to inform you that the amount set aside for contract schools for the fiscal year 1894 (for the education, etc., of 4,767 pupils) amounted to \$537,600. Of this amount, \$177,790 for 1,200 pupils was specifically appropriated for by Congress. When the matter of contract schools was taken up for the current fiscal year, the amounts specifically appropriated by Congress remaining the same as in 1894, the contracts let by this office only were taken into consideration, and there was a general reduction in the number and amounts allowed by this office, aggregating a trifle over 20 per cent; that is, \$285,715 for 1895, against \$359,810 for 1894. In making these reductions some contracts were not renewed, others were reduced more or less, and the ground was carefully gone over so as not to deprive any Indian children entirely of educational facilities. Where they could be put into Government schools or into public schools the reductions were the largest. In some instances, in isolated locations, where there were no Government or public schools open to pupils, no reductions were made. By following this plan and gradually reducing the contracts year by year, and placing the pupils in Government schools or, better still, in public

schools, the contract schools can be entirely done away with in the course of five or six years, and this without doing any great injury to the parties who have their money invested in these contract schools; and, at the same time, provide adequate school facilities for the Indian pupils.

The total cost to the Government of pupils in contract boarding schools, under the present contracts, will be \$122.40 per capita, whereas the amount allowed in the appropriation bill for Government schools is \$167 per capita, which may be increased to \$200 per capita at the discretion of the Secretary.

To discontinue all contract schools in the near future, and provide Government schools in their stead, the total cost to the Government in erecting suitable buildings, such as are now being erected by this office, and furnishing the same complete ready for occupancy, to say nothing of subsistence and clothing, would be, approximately, \$1,203,060. This, however, is based upon the supposition that all buildings erected would be on agencies where there would be no cost for the land.

Very respectfully,

D. M. BROWNING,
Commissioner.

The SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

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