

2-17-1885

Letter from the Secretary of the Interior,  
transmitting papers additional to those transmitted  
December 30, 1884, relative to leasing lands on the  
Crow Indian Reservation, in Montana.

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L E T T E R

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR,

TRANSMITTING

*Papers additional to those transmitted on the 17th instant, relative to leasing Indian lands in the Crow Reservation, Montana.*

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FEBRUARY 19, 1885.—Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs and ordered to be printed.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
*Washington, February 19, 1885.*

SIR: Referring to my letter of the 17th instant, submitting certain papers relating to the leasing of lands on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana Territory, I have the honor to present herewith a copy of a letter from Agent Armstrong on the subject, dated February 10, 1885; also a report from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs of January 27, 1885, submitting a proposition made by John T. Murphy to lease lands on said reservation.

I respectfully request that these papers be attached to and printed with the documents sent with my said report of the 17th instant.

Very respectfully,

H. M. TELLER,  
*Secretary.*

The PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE UNITED STATES SENATE.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, January 27, 1885.*

SIR: I have the honor to inclose herewith the application of John T. Murphy, of Montana, for permission to graze cattle on the Crow Reservation, and to recommend that if it is decided by you to lease any part of this reservation for such purposes it be done by public auction after due public notice is given, and the contract or lease be given to the highest bidder. My opinion is that 3,000,000 acres of the west end of this reservation can be leased for \$100,000 per annum.

Very respectfully,

H. PRICE,  
*Commissioner.*

Hon. H. M. TELLER,  
*Secretary of the Interior.*

WASHINGTON, D. C., *January 20, 1885.*

Understanding a lease has been made by the Crow Indians of about 2,500,000 acres of grazing lands, being a portion of their reservation, for about \$30,000 per annum, I very respectfully request, in the event it is determined by the Government to make or ratify any leases of a portion of the Crow Indian Reservation, that I be permitted to submit proposals for the same, and now say that for such an amount of grazing land as above stated I am prepared to offer a much better price per annum, and also to furnish approved security for the faithful compliance with terms, of any lease awarded. I would state further that I am a resident cattle owner of Montana Territory, and refer to the Hon. Martin Maginnis, Delegate from Montana Territory, as to ability, &c.

Very respectfully,

JOHN T. MURPHY.

Post-office address: Helena, Montana.

Hon. H. PRICE,  
*Commissioner Indian Affairs, Washington, D. C.*

UNITED STATES INDIAN SERVICE,  
*Crow Agency, Montana, February 10, 1885.*

Hon. H. PRICE,  
*Commissioner Indian Affairs, Washington, D. C. :*

SIR: By this time you have doubtless received from H. H. Mund, representing a committee of the Billings Board of Trade, a communication purporting to be testimony of Crow Indians regarding the lease of a portion of this reservation to Blake and Wilson, said testimony having been taken by the committee as authorized by your telegram dated January 21.

I want to say that the so-called testimony is as great a mass of perjury (if such a crime can be charged against a wild Indian) as was ever taken down.

If we begin at the beginning of the testimony, as taken down by the committee, we find that nearly every Indian perjured himself either of his own free will or because they were intimidated by the turbulent hostile Indians who were present by a previous arrangement of the committee for that especial purpose. Every Indian who swore that they were threatened with having their rations stopped swore falsely.

I do not deny that I was willing the lease should be made; but I do deny that I did anything more than permit the business to go on, as I was authorized to do by the honorable Assistant Secretary.

I believe the matter was as fully explained and as fairly entered into as any agreement that has ever been made with any Indian tribes, or as it is possible to make an agreement with any tribe.

They were told that they would receive \$50 to \$60 every year for each head of a family, and that it would be paid to them in cash, into the hands of each head of a family. They were also told that at the time the money came to be paid, if they wished to do so, and by the consent of a majority, and in no other way, they could use the money to purchase an additional supply of beef, and if they did not wish to do so then the rations we were issuing would have to be decreased still further to make our supply of beef cattle last through the year. This is the exact truth, and is all that was said about the rations; and it is still the understanding that each head of a family will be called up and the cash paid into his hand unless they hold another council and agree and authorize the lessees to use the money to purchase beef cattle. At the time this matter was explained to them by Blake I had not received the information from the honorable Commissioner that the contractor had been called on to deliver the extra 25 per cent. on his contract, but had received a communication stating that no more beef cattle would be furnished us, and the situation seemed desperate to me.

I want to show that the object of the committee of the Billings Board of Trade in coming here was not to take testimony, as they had represented to the honorable Commissioner, but to incite the Indians. I want to show how they have delayed and defeated the Government business—the regular business of the agency; I want to show how they have placed the turbulent, hostile element in the Crow Nation in the ascendancy—as it has never been before—over that party which is inclined to be peaceable and to settle down and live in houses and farm; how they have done more harm here than any agent can overcome in a whole year.

In the first place, they sent a lying squawman up here from the Yellowstone three or four weeks before the committee came for the purpose of finding out which Indians were particularly unfriendly with me, as it is impossible for any agent to conduct the business of the agency without getting the ill-will of some.

They next persuaded those unfriendly Indians to go to Junction City, and there worked upon them, as one of the committee at least—Mr. McCormick—knows perfectly well how to do, until they had them fixed so they would say anything the committee wanted them to say.

They told the Indians falsehoods, such as they (the Indians) had been deceived and cheated, and that instead of signing a lease they had signed an agreement to sell their country.

They told the Indians that one member of the committee had just come from the Great Father; that he spoke by authority, and therefore would tell them no lies. They proceeded to incite the Indians against the authority of the agent; told them they must not sign any paper at the agency or even talk to the agent about business, and in this way have probably defeated the proposition to amend the Crow treaty, which I consider the second best thing I have ever tried to do for the Crows. And the paper sent here for the signatures of the Crows, authorizing the honorable Commissioner to expend the \$5,500 left from the purchase of annuities, would have been defeated if it had required the signatures of a majority of the Crows, or of all the chiefs.

They instructed the Indians that they must not talk with their agent on business, and even had certain Indians remain near this office all the while to keep other Indians from coming to see their agent. They got Spotted Horse, who is as mean an Indian as ever lived, to sign the remonstrance against the lease (the paper fixed up at Billings or Junction City), as a war chief, something that has never been done before, and persuaded him that he was the principal chief of the Crows, and then sent him back to intimidate the whole tribe, and have them fixed by the time the committee would arrive at the agency.

On the day they took testimony, as they called it, they had Spotted Horse and Deaf Bull (who is a terror among the Crows) take seats at the table next to the seat that was reserved for the Indians the committee proposed to question, for the purpose of compelling all the Crows to talk as they wanted them to talk, or to keep those who would not talk so from talking at all. This Spotted Horse has always talked as meanly as it was possible for him to do so. He has told me that he would kill some of the Indians if they didn't stop farming.

And this is the man the committee put forward to intimidate the Crow people, and thus get them to say just what they wanted them to say. The result was that the better element of the Crow Nation was in doubt as to what was the best thing for them to do, and so either staid away entirely to avoid quarreling with Spotted Horse and his young men and Deaf Bull, or else said they wanted the lease stopped, as they would have said of any paper or proposition that might have been presented to them at such a time and in such a manner.

I think it was a very great wrong to permit outside parties to come upon this reservation to incite the Indians as they have done. It would have been all right, of course, to send an officer of the Department, or several of them, if necessary, to arrive at the truth of the matter concerning the lease.

I maintain, and shall always maintain as long as I live, that the only wrong done here was the wrong of tying up a great body of country that ought to be thrown open for settlement; but there was no fraud, no intimidation or threats, nor bribery to induce the Crows to sign the lease.

Very respectfully,

H. J. ARMSTRONG,  
*Agent.*

I hope the Hon. Commissioner will believe me when I say that my only object in writing this communication is to establish the fact that we have not been guilty of any wrong-doing in connection with this lease business, as is charged in some of the papers. When I say we, I mean myself or any of my employés.