

Publicity forces withdrawal of controversial letter

By LINDA LORD-JENKINS
Tundra Times

A Utah congressman's letter to Department of Interior Secretary James Watt suggesting that all special treaties with American Indians be terminated was withdrawn after publicity about the letter leaked to members of Indian press.

The letter was sent to Watt by Rep. James V. Hansen, a one-term Republican representative from Utah who wrote to Watt about a bill proposed in 1977 which would terminate all treaties of American Indians and Natives.

That bill was never passed but before it was tabled a storm of controversy arose in Lower 48 Indian communities.

Hansen's letter reads:

The Honorable James G. Watt
Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
Dear Jim:

I have carefully studied the 1982 Wilderness Act which was drafted by your office, and which I am co-sponsoring. Taking it point by point, it is a well drafted, reasonable vehicle for the people of the West and the people of this country.

I especially think the extension date to the year 2000 is wise, rather than leaving it in perpetuity. The escape clause by the President is reasonable, and the deadline for Congress to act was well thought out.

Present conditions with the makeup of Congress, I wouldn't stake my life on its passage. However, I wanted you to know that I am a strong supporter, and hopefully the

verbose and unreasonable hot heads will come around to way of thinking.

Secondly, Jim, I would like some counsel from you regarding the following matter to do with our treatment of Indians in general: For sake of background, when I was Speaker of the Utah House of Representatives, 1979-80, I worked on the "Indian Compact" between the State of Utah and the Ute Indian Tribe. After months of thoughtful study I came to accept the premise that we treat the Indians, or Native Americans (if there is such a thing), as mentally retarded children. We take away their opportunity for advancement, they become perpetual recipients of welfare, they live in squalor, they have no incentive for betterment and their personal habits have declined at a rapid rate.

In my opinion, they are the worse example of what a welfare state can do to individuals. Possibly it is because of my religious background, belief in work, self-sufficiency, and belief that welfare without work is a grave sin, which brings me to these conclusions. Since that first encounter with Indian problems, I have been faced with the stark reality that the United States of America has made some terrible agreements that have degraded a once proud people.

As a Republican Study Committee member serving with Jack Field's National Resources subcommittee, we have assigned a staff member, Su-

zanne Reed, to determine how much money in any form i.e., royalties, grants, fees, subsidies from any source etc., goes to the Indian tribes.

We found the shocking example of the Ute Tribe in Utah which receives enough in mineral royalties and fees to pay each member of that tribe, man, woman and child, about \$7,000 per year, and we are still trying to determine all of the other sources of income members of that tribe receive. Yet when you drive through that reservation, what do you see but broken down houses, beat-up pickup trucks, and junk stacked in the yards. In negotiating the "Indian Compact," we found those people are more interested in shooting two deer a year than they are in their grazing, water and mineral rights.

I am enclosing a copy of a bill introduced in Congress back on September 12, 1977, which called for the following:

Directs the President to abrogate all treaties between the United States and Indian tribes; brings all Indian tribes and their members under State law to the same degree as other American citizens; terminates all special Federal services provided to Indians because of their status as Indians, and makes inapplicable to Indians all Federal laws which affect Indians because of their status as Indians. The measure also provides for the distribution to individual tribal members of tribal land and

assets held in trust for the tribe by the United States, or if the tribe prefers, transfer of such tribal lands and assets to tribal corporations, to be created in place of tribal bodies as presently constituted. H.R. 9054 provides for specific abrogation of Indian hunting and fishing rights granted by treaties and authorized compensation for property rights created in treaties for particular individuals. In short, H.R. 9054 terminates all Federal supervision of Indians and Indian tribes and makes Indians subject to all the same laws, in the same degree, as are all other American citizens.

I know this is quite a turnaround in present practice, and I question if it can be done. However, there are quite a number of us who want to take a closer look at this approach. If it were possible, it may lay to rest all these thousands of problems which we encounter with our good friends of Indian heritage.

Before I go off half-cocked and do something really stupid, would you please favor me with some of your good counsel concerning this problem. I think it would be prudent if this matter not be discussed in very broad circles at this time, as neither of us needs the kind of problems it could bring on our heads.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this matter and advise me of your thinking on it.

Sincerely yours,

James V. Hansen
Member of Congress

The letter has been printed in many Indian newspapers.

When contacted by the Tundra Times, Hansen said he

never intended any harm by his inquiry which he termed a sincere effort on his part to get the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the federal government off the back of American Indians.

"I feel the BIA... has held them down. I don't believe in the welfare paternalistic system. There are tremendous examples of Indians who have broken out of that system."

Hansen said his "intentions were pure and I feel my behavior was good. It was no indictment against Indians or against the government."

Hansen said he apologized to members of the Ute tribe which he referred to in the letter and to many Indian people who called to protest the letter.

Hansen said many of the callers pointed out their frustrations about the federal government and about the quality of their lives. "A lot of them have the same frustrations that I did... now, how do you come to grips with those frustrations?" Hansen asked.

Hansen said Watt never sent any more than a letter of acknowledgement to his first letter and the congressman said he has since suggested the entire matter be dropped.

In summarizing the affair he said, "It's hard to put yourself from one culture to another. When you try, you end up making mistakes. On this one issue, I made a mistake."

"I'm surely not the Indian fighter people are making me out to be."

Hansen's congressional district included the Ute reservation until the state's voting districts were reapportioned. He no longer represents that district.