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October 29, 1974

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I have signed S. 3007, an act to authorize appropriations for the Indian Claims Commission for 1975.

It is a particular pleasure for me to be able to sign this bill because there are not many opportunities in life to take clear and decisive action designed to right a past wrong.

The background is this:

In 1877, the United States Government took over lands from the Sioux Indians in the Black Hills of South Dakota. At the same time, to prevent widespread starvation of these Indians deprived of their hunting grounds, the Government supplied them with food and other provisions for a number of years.

Earlier this year, the Indian Claims Commission ruled that the United States took the Black Hills lands illegally in violation of the Fifth Amendment. The 1877 value of the land and gold was estimated at \$17.5 million which, together with interest from that point, boosts the value today to nearly \$103 million.

However, the Indian Claims Commission Act of 1946 contains a provision requiring that the Government-supplied food and other provisions, valued at approximately \$57 million, be used to offset the Indians' claims against the Government. If this offsetting provision stayed in effect, it would totally wipe out the \$17.5 million original evaluation and leave the Sioux Indians with nothing.

The basic legal question of whether or not the Sioux have a legitimate claim against the United States over the Black Hills land is still being litigated in the courts. However, in passing this act, Congress has determined -- and I agree -- that if such a claim is held to be valid, it would be unfair and unjust to try to avoid paying it by deducting the cost of previously supplied food and provisions.

Although we cannot undo the injustices from our history, we can insure that the actions we take today are just and fair and designed to heal such wounds from the past.

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