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Congressional Record S. 2645-7, Northern Cheyenne and Strip Mining

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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THE NORTHERN CHEYENNES AND STRIP MINING OF COAL IN MONTANA

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, almost everyone is aware of the fact that in the Fort Union and Power River Basins of Montana, the Dakotas, and Wyoming there are huge coal deposits, some of them at the present time being exploited, others in the process of being exploited.

The Senate is also aware that this body, last year, passed a good strip mining control bill, which is now in the House and is, at the present time, I think, being considered by that body. The Senate passed bill is, in my opinion, a far superior measure than that recommended to the House for adoption. It would be my hope that the bill which passed the Senate would be passed in toto, or as close to it as possible, so that, as far as Montana is concerned, we would have a Federal law which would complement the Montana State law which, in my opinion, is the strongest State strip mining control law in the Nation.

Furthermore, we have in Montana a number of Indian tribes which are interested in coal development on their reservations. One is the northern Cheyenne Tribe, in the southeastern part of the State, a tribe numbering about 2,000. It is a tribe which has had to depend on meager forest reserves its tribal cattle herd and its coal deposits in order to be able to achieve a livelihood.

The unemployment factor among the Northern Cheyennes has been somewhere between 25 and 35 percent for, lo these many years.

At present, the Northern Cheyennes have drawn up plans for the tribe to process its coal deposits, which are estimated at between $10 and $15 billion in value. Unfortunately, some leases have been entered into with some of the major coal concerns, and the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council is trying to have those leases cancelled because of irregularities by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in granting the leases. It is trying to work out a formula by which the tribe itself can develop these resources, perhaps even inaugurate a petrochemical plant on the reservation. At present, the Tribal Council is having some difficulties with the Department of the Interior.

Senator METCALF and I are totally, completely, and wholly on the side of the Northern Cheyennes. We would hope that the Interior Department would do something shortly to see that the rights of the Northern Cheyennes are given every consideration and that, in case of doubt, the Government should resolve that doubt in the Indian's favor, so that we could in some small way repay the Northern Cheyennes for what we have done to them down through the decades.

I point out, Mr. President, that it was the Cheyennes and the Sioux who carried the battle against Col. George Custer and brought about his defeat at the Battle of the Little Big Horn, in 1877, less than
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100 years after that defeat, they were forced to go back to Oklahoma. But the Northern Cheyennes became homeless again, the grounds given them in Oklahoma, and they trekked from Oklahoma back to Montana. They had to contend with the U.S. Cavalry on the way and with starvation, disease, which carried off many of their people rather than work in distant cities.

The Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council report on developing the coal states:

"The Northern Cheyenne intends to change Indians into a tribal entity... The energy issue has been recognized by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the past, but have evidenced little more than apathy toward this need to recognize that it not anywhere near enough to implementing the Federal government's preservation officials. Last year "Cheyennes" for Indians and Alaska natives.

There are several obstacles to overcome—

- First, the Peabody Coal Co. of St. Louis is already a non-destructive mining operation, and has no intention of making any coal reservation.

- Second, the Cheyennes are looking for a company to operate under the reservation, not anywhere near enough to take care of the tribe, which has always tried to lift itself by its own bootstraps.

- And what I have said today will be heard downtown, in the Department of the Interior. I hope that something will be done on the part of the government to recognize that it has an obligation to the first Americans.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that an article published in the Washington Post of yesterday, entitled "Cheyennes Set Plan To Process Coal," be printed in the Record.

The bill being considered, the article and letter are ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

CHEYENNES SET PLAN TO PROCESS COAL

(by George C. Wilson)

The Northern Cheyennes in Montana have drawn up a plan for the tribe to process the $18 billion of coal under their reservation. At the same time, they are trying to establish a mining company to handle the coal.

The proposal has drawn high-level political backing to date, including support from Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, the chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, the Indian Trust Resources Management Act, which has been passed by the House and Senate, and signed by President Bill Clinton. The bill, which is expected to pass both Houses of Congress, would give the tribe the right to develop and operate a coal mine on the reservation.

The tribe intends to use the coal to power its own homes and businesses, as well as sell it to other tribes and the federal government. The tribe has already signed a contract with Peabody Energy Corp., the largest coal company in the world, to purchase 30,000 tons of coal per year.

The tribe is also in discussions with other companies, including Arch Coal and Peabody Energy Corp., to develop a coal-fired power plant on the reservation.

The tribe is working with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to develop the necessary permits and regulations needed to begin developing the coal.

The tribe has already signed a lease agreement with Peabody Energy Corp. to develop a coal-fired power plant on the reservation. The tribe is also in discussions with other companies, including Arch Coal and Peabody Energy Corp., to develop a coal-fired power plant on the reservation.

The tribe is working with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to develop the necessary permits and regulations needed to begin developing the coal. The tribe is also in discussions with other companies, including Arch Coal and Peabody Energy Corp., to develop a coal-fired power plant on the reservation.

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Sincerely yours,

MIKE MANSFIELD.
Mr. TOM C. KOROLOGOS,
Deputy Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs, The White House, Washington, D.C.

DEAR TOM: On February 26th, Allen Rowland, President of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe and a delegation from his Montana reservation have an appointment with Len Garment to discuss the cancellation of coal leases on their reservation.

This matter, now before the Secretary of the Interior, is one of considerable concern to the Northern Cheyenne and the Montana Congressional Delegation. They have our support, and I would appreciate anything the White House can do to assist them.

Sincerely yours,

MIKE MANSFIELD.