

Durant, Oklahoma
November 7, 1947

Dear Indian Friend:

During the past year, I have received numerous requests from different members of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Tribes relative to information regarding the status of the proposed sale of the coal and asphalt deposits belonging to the two tribes, jointly. I have tried to keep the two tribes informed to the best of my ability on the true conditions of affairs, and I promised many of you that when anything new developed, I would try to advise you accordingly. This letter is the fulfillment of that promise.

As many of you know, the Choctaw-Chickasaw Confederation sent a delegation of Choctaws and Chickasaws to Washington last April to sit in on the negotiations of the sale of our holdings to the U. S. Government. At the formal hearing conducted by officials from the office of the Department of the Interior, we were apprised of the fact that the government had the year previously appraised our property at \$2, 211, 991.08, but that the government might be able to raise that appraisal to \$3,500,000.00. We told the officials flatly that it would be useless for them to hope to get the Indians to vote to approve a contract for that amount. This formal meeting adjourned and we were told that negotiations between the tribal officials and the government officials would start at 1:30 p.m. that afternoon and that we who were sent as delegates from the Confederation would not be allowed to attend this meeting as it would be closed to all but tribal and government officials. Upon calling the Interior Office for the status of the negotiations early next morning, we were told that no agreement had been reached, and that it would take at least two days more of negotiating before anything definite would come out of the meeting.

Upon our request that we be allowed to sit in as interested observers, we were emphatically denied admittance to the parley. Then, we appealed to our Congressmen and Senators to see if they could effect our entrance to this meeting in which our great Indian heritage was being bartered away. After numerous telephone calls, the officials consented to give us a report at three-thirty on the status of the negotiations. When three-thirty came, can you imagine our utter amazement when we were told that the negotiations were over, that an agreement had been reached in two hours that they intended to take two days on, and that the government was offering the Indians \$8,500,000.00 for their property, a raise of \$5,000,000.00 over the \$3,500,000.00, done in a matter of hours? There are a lot of questions that come to the inquiring Indian's mind as to why and how this was done. I am unprepared to give a full analysis of all the proceedings that went on behind those closed doors, because we Indians were shut out.

And now the contract has been signed and is being submitted to the members of the two tribes. Let me urge every enrolled Choctaw or Chickasaw wishes to vote on this proposition to send in your name, exactly as you were enrolled by the Dawes Commission, and your present name if you are a married woman, your address, and whether you are a Choctaw or Chickasaw by blood, marriage, or newborn, or enrolled minor. This should go to W. O. Roberts, Superintendent of the Five Tribes Agency, Muskogee, Oklahoma, at once if you have not already received your ballot and contract. When you have received your contract, be sure to study it carefully. If you cannot read, then get someone to read the contract to you. And let me urge you to study with unusual care the first paragraph. That is one of the most important sections in the entire agreement. If, after you have studied this contract, you wish to vote for the sale, then it is your right and duty to vote "yes". If, on the other hand, you don't feel that the Indians are getting a square deal, then, it is your duty to vote "no". I do not wish to take the responsibility of advising people how to vote. Many Indians have written me, some have called me by telephone, and quite a number of them have paid me personal visits asking my views on this, the last of our joint domain. I know that the Indians are divided in their opinion and there is good argument on both sides. But, personally, I have done a lot of work in an effort to get the Indians the right to vote upon this proposition. The price set was not set by me, neither have I accepted it, because I have not cast my ballot yet. Each enrolled member has a right to say whether he or she is willing to take the price offered, and I do not care to make any campaign either for or against it. It is up to each of us to look into the matter and to decide for ourselves what we shall do. No one can force us to vote either way, but I must tell you that the matter is important, and whatever the outcome, it is a history-making proposition.

Nothing is clear as to when the per capita payments will be made, therefore, your guess is as good as mine as to when we can expect our payment if the sale is made. The voting period is from November 1 to November 30, 1947, consequently every enrolled member of the two tribes should procure a ballot and contract between these two dates and in time to cast a vote in time for it to reach the office of the Superintendent of the Five Tribes Agency at Muskogee.

Information has reached this office that Ben Dwight, Choctaw Tribal Attorney, W. A. Durant, Chief of the Choctaws, and Floyd Maytubby, Governor of the Chickasaws, are making a campaign and are holding a series of meetings in an effort to get the Indians to vote for the contract. Following are the places and dates of the meetings held by Dwight and Durant, however, we have not been apprised of the places and dates of the meetings to be held by Maytubby:

Wednesday, November 12, Durant 9:30 a.m.; Hugo, 2:00 p.m.
Thursday, November 13, Idabel 9:30 a.m.; Antlers 2:00 p.m.
Friday, November 14, Poteau 9:30 a.m.; McAlester 2:00 p.m.
Saturday, November 15, Atoka 9:30 a.m.; Ada 2:00 p.m.

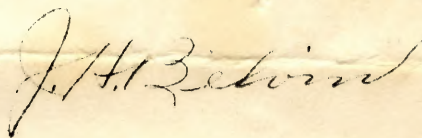
I should advise every member of the two tribes to try to attend the meeting most

convenient for you, and if you have any friends who may not be notified of these meetings, please notify them so that they too may have a chance to attend and to get the information that may be brought out.

And now regarding dead claims: In the event the sale is made, a stipulation in the contract is to the effect that "the share of a deceased member shall be distributed to his heirs or devisees determined in conformity with the law applicable at the date of the death of the deceased member, or the date of the death of his heirs or devisees. Before payment is made to the heirs of any deceased member, proof of death and heirship satisfactory to the Superintendent for the Five Civilized Tribes Agency must be made, and the finding of said Superintendent upon such proof shall be final and conclusive." This can all be worked after the sale is made, and there is no need to be concerned about the dead claims until after the sale is made.

In closing, I wish to advise those of you who have not voted not to be too hasty in doing so. Attend some of the above mentioned meetings and get all the information available, and then you will be in a position to better judge for yourselves as to how your vote should be cast.

Most sincerely yours,



J. H. Belvin
State President
Choctaw-Chickasaw Confederation