

STATEMENT OF TOM DASCHLE
ON THE
CHEYENNE RIVER SIOUX INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT TRUST FUND ACT
SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
JULY 8, 1998

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I want to thank you for agreeing to hold this hearing on S. 1905, legislation that I introduced this year to compensate the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe for losses it suffered when the Oahe dam was constructed in South Dakota nearly forty years ago. This bill is a companion to the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe Infrastructure Development Trust Fund Act of 1996, and the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe Infrastructure Development Trust Fund Act of 1997, both of which passed Congress unanimously and currently are providing those tribes with long-overdue compensation for similar injuries suffered when the Corps of Engineers constructed the Big Bend Dam on the Missouri River in South Dakota.

The importance of enacting this legislation cannot be stated strongly enough. It has been nearly forty years since the Oahe dam was constructed, flooding 104,000 acres of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe's bottom lands and requiring the involuntary resettlement of almost 30% of the tribal population living there, including four entire communities. Equally as important, the tribe lost 80 percent of its fertile river bottom lands -- lands that represented the basis for the tribal economy.

These losses can still be felt today. Last year, during the extreme winter of 1996-1997, the tribe lost roughly 30,000 head of livestock, including 25,000 head of cattle. And without adequate natural shelter, the remaining Indian ranchers can expect to have similar difficulty scratching out a living in future years.

The Army Corps of Engineers, which constructed and operates the dams, estimates that the project's overall annual contribution to the national economy averages \$1.27 billion. However, for the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, the human and economic costs have far outweighed the benefits received.

As has been well documented in reports by researchers of the Robert McLaughlin Company and the General Accounting Office, the compensation requested in this legislation, \$290 million, represents a fair return for the losses the tribe incurred when its land was taken for the Pick-Sloan project -- losses that profoundly affected the quality of life on the Cheyenne River reservation.

Mr. Chairman, the damage caused by the Pick-Sloan project has had a significant impact on every aspect of life on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation. We cannot, of course, roll back the clock, but it is my hope that the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Infrastructure Development Trust Fund Act will provide the resources necessary for the tribe to enhance economic development on the reservation, and help make it whole.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. Passage of this bill will fulfill a long-overdue debt to the tribe. I urge the committee to mark up this legislation this year so that we

may finally end this chapter in the history of this reservation and establish a bright future for the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.