

October 9, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary
(Dallas, Texas)

NOTICE TO THE PRESS

The President has signed S. 2981 - Appropriation authorization for the Indian Claims Commission for fiscal year 1977. This bill authorizes appropriations in the amount of \$1,650,000 for the Indian Claims Commission for fiscal year 1977 and extends the life of the Commission through September 30, 1978.

Under the Indian Claims Commission Act, the Commission was created in 1946 to adjudicate claims involving Native American Indian rights to land and compensation to Indians for the value of their aboriginal claims to land.

The bill will also require that upon dissolution, the Commission shall deliver to the Archivist of the United States all case records and files in which a final determination has been entered, and by December 31, 1976, transfer to the U.S. Court of Claims all cases which it has determined cannot be completely adjudicated by September 30, 1978. S. 2981 directs the Commission to file a report to the Congress on the first day of the next session on those cases which it transferred to the Archives and the Court of Claims and at six-month intervals thereafter on the status of its remaining work.

The President has signed H.R. 13374 - Minnesota River Valley National Wildlife Refuge. This bill establishes the Minnesota River Valley National Wildlife Refuge and an adjacent wildlife recreation area, and authorizes appropriations of not more than \$14.5 million and \$6 million for land acquisition and development.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, as amended, assigns responsibility to the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to provide for the preservation, development, and management of wildlife habitat areas included in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Under the Act, new units of the system may be established by law, executive order, or administrative designation by the Secretary of the Interior. The Secretary is generally authorized to cooperate with any State or other Federal agency in the acquisition, development, and regulation of public use of refuge lands, consistent with the overall purpose of conservation and management of designated wildlife habitat.

The Lower Minnesota River Valley consists of an extensive network of floodplain marshes along the main channel of the Minnesota River.

The bill establishes the Refuge and an adjacent wildlife recreation area along a section of the Lower Minnesota River approximately 30 miles southwest of the Minneapolis - St. Paul metropolitan area. The bill will direct the Secretary of the Interior to acquire approximately 9,500 acres within the boundaries of the proposed refuge area within six years of enactment. Acquisition costs would be financed through the Federal portion of the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

H.R. 13374 will also direct the establishment of an 8,000-acre wildlife recreation area on lands adjacent to the refuge. These lands would be acquired and administered by the State of Minnesota in cooperation with the Fish and Wildlife Service. For this purpose, the Secretary would be authorized to reimburse the State for up to 50 percent of the cost of planning, acquisition, and development of the area.

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The bill further directs the Secretary, in cooperation with the State, to develop a comprehensive plan for the preservation and development of the refuge and adjacent recreation area. This plan, to be completed within three years of enactment, would provide management guidelines for both federally controlled refuge lands and State-Federal recreation areas. In addition, the plan would provide for the inclusion of the Minnesota Valley Trail Corridor, authorized and administered by the State, as an integral part of the refuge and recreation area, as well as other provisions considered necessary by the Secretary and the State.

The President has signed H.R. 3954 - Defense Medical Personnel Malpractice Liability Protection Act. This bill protects from individual liability certain medical personnel of the Department of Defense, the armed forces, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Guard, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, while they are acting within the scope of their official duties.

This bill will extend protection against medical malpractice suits to medical personnel of the armed forces, Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Guard, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. This protection would cover physicians, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, paramedics, and other medical support personnel while acting within the scope of their official duties. With the exception of the National Guard, the protection H.R. 3954 will provide is essentially the same as the protection now provided to Veterans Administration, Public Health Service, and State Department employees. The bill would make claims against the United States under the Federal Tort Claims Act the only legal recourse available to claimants seeking remuneration for injury or death allegedly resulting from medical malpractice. For the National Guard, the bill would make an individual medical malpractice liability incurred by a Guard member, acting within the scope of his duties and while engaged in certain training exercises, the liability of the United States.

The President has signed H.R. 11890 - Relief of Bernard Julian Phillips, to permit the issuance of an immigrant visa to an alien convicted of a drug offense who is the spouse of a United States citizen.

The President has signed S. 3843, naming the Visitors' Center at the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore the "Philip A. Hart Visitors' Center."

The President has signed H.R. 10793 - Relief of Afat Yassine and her children, Najla Yassine, Walid Yassine, Mona Yassine, and Maher Yassine, to restore eligibility for preferential immigrant status to the widow and children of an alien eligible for an immigrant visa as the brother of a United States citizen.

The President has signed S. 3380 - For the relief of Mary Vance Trent, increasing Foreign Service retirement annuity for Mary Vance Trent to the amount that would have been payable if she had retired prior to April 1, 1974.