

Ottawa, May 10, 1905.

Right Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, G.C.M.G.,  
Ottawa.

Dear Sir Wilfrid,—In view of the fact that my name was mentioned in the correspondence submitted to the House yesterday, relative to the Northwest Territories boundary fence matter, I think it proper for me to make a statement, which may be read to the House at the same time as any explanation is given on behalf of the government.

About the end of March, I received from Mr. Coatsworth, an employee of the Page Wire Fence Company, Limited, of Ontario, a letter intimating that the company had seen an item in one of the papers to the effect that the government intended building 600 miles of wire fencing on the boundary line between the United States and Canada, and asking me to secure information on the subject.

Having known that the Department of Railways did a good deal of wire fencing, I thought the minister of that department might know something about this matter, and on the 31st March I wrote a letter of inquiry to him. On April 4 he wrote me that if there was anything in the proposition referred to by Mr. Coatsworth it would not arise in his department. I then placed the matter in the hands of my secretary. Owing to there being no minister in charge of the Department of the Interior, and to the deputy minister being absent, he had a little difficulty in securing the information. He was finally informed that the matter was already under contract. On April 14 I accordingly wrote a letter to Mr. Coatsworth apprising him, as I had been informed, that the McGregor-Banwell Fence Company, of Walkerville, had been awarded the contract some time before, and the preparation of the written agreement was in the hands of the Justice Department. On the same day, and in answer to a similar request just received from the McGregor-Banwell Fence Company, I wrote a letter giving them exactly the same information. Mr. Coatsworth wrote to me a further letter, dated April 17, which I did not receive until my return to Ottawa after the Easter vacation. I replied to the same on April 27 along similar lines to my first letter. Then when the question was asked in the House, and answered by yourself, as Acting Minister of the Interior, I noticed the variation between the information I had received and your answer. I asked my secretary to procure that portion of the 'Hansard' covering the question and answer, and he reported to me that on looking for it he could not find it therein. On making inquiries he learned it had been inadvertently omitted, but that the omission would be remedied. On May 5, therefore, I wrote a third letter to Mr. Coatsworth, informing him that the question had been asked in the House, and an answer given to the effect that no tenders had been invited for the work as yet, nor had any contract been made. On the same day I wrote the McGregor-Banwell Fence Company a similar letter.

So far as I am concerned, I knew absolutely nothing about the matter beyond what appears as above in this letter.

I was not at any time asked by, or on behalf of the McGregor-Banwell Fence Company, to assist them in securing the contract in question, nor was I directly or indirectly instrumental in assisting them in the matter. I never saw the Minister of the Interior, or his deputy, or any official in the department, on the subject. In fact, I knew nothing personally about the mat-

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ter until asked to make inquiries, as above, by both the firms mentioned, which inquiries I made through my secretary and answered in as definite and courteous a way as possible.

Yours sincerely,

R. F. SUTHERLAND.

I have only to add, for further information, that for several years past, the ranchers in the Northwest Territories have been asking that a wire fence be put up on our side of the line so as to protect them against the incursions of American cattle. Some years ago the ex-Minister of the Interior (Mr. Sifton) asked for a sum in the estimates to build some twenty miles of fencing; but upon further consideration he found that that would be absolutely insufficient and did not then pursue the matter further. From time to time, however, the builders of such fences were negotiated with in order to obtain from them quotations of prices, and amongst others latterly the McGregor-Banwell Company were asked to put in a tender, and theirs was the last tender which was submitted in January. The ex-Minister of the Interior (Mr. Sifton) accepted their prices, but found fault with some part of their tender—I think the posts; and the matter was in that position when he left office. The deputy minister of the department submitted to the Department of Justice a formal contract, supposing it would be awarded. The Department of Justice reported upon it, but rather suggested that such a fence ought to be built by the Department of Public Works after tenders had been invited, and the matter did not go any further. The secretary of the department, Mr. Keyes—a very good officer by the way—having referred the matter to the Department of Justice, assumed, when he received the letter from the Page Fencing Company, that the contract had been awarded. In point of fact no award had been given, the parties were not communicated with, nothing was done, and the matter rested there. So that in point of fact, when the question was asked of the government by my hon. friend from Kent (Mr. Clements) I made inquiry of the department and received the information I gave the House. I did not know anything of the matter, I did not know that there had been no contract awarded and no tenders invited. If hon. gentlemen will look into the estimates of this year, they will find there an appropriation for the sum of \$100,000 for the building of such a fence, and the policy will be discussed when that vote comes up. At present no contract has been given, the parties have not been so informed, and nothing has been done; and the answer I gave the other day is quite accurate.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. Would the right hon. gentleman state how many miles were embraced in the proposed contract and the price?