



MAR 01 2007



The Honorable Byron Dorgan
Chairman, Committee on Indian Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter and continued interest in legislation to address Indian land trusts. The Administration strongly supports a comprehensive legislative package designed to strengthen the partnership between the Federal Government and American Indians by moving from a litigation-oriented relationship to one of economic prosperity, empowerment, and self-reliance for tribes and individual Indians.

To achieve these goals, the Administration is willing to invest up to \$7 billion, over a ten year period, as explained in the enclosed summary. A legislative package valued at that amount would need to take the next step, over an appropriate term of years, in true self-governance and self-determination, by ensuring trust lands are managed by Indian owners and tribes who have full authority, responsibility, and liability for their decisions. Legislation that embraces an Indian owner-managed trust relationship will permit Indian landowners and tribes to exercise their rights to the full beneficial use and enjoyment of their property interests.

Our commitment to implement a successful Indian owner-managed trust relationship includes legislative mechanisms and priority funding to consolidate the millions of fractionated interests that have severely undermined the economic viability of many Indian allotments. In the short term, this land interest consolidation initiative would result in a substitution of trust assets – Indians will receive cash in place of the mostly unmarketable fractionated land interests held by many minor interest owners. In the long term, we believe that the consolidation of fractionated land interests will significantly increase the value of the trust estate, enable increased opportunity for economic development, and ensure Indian landowners are able to make land use decisions.

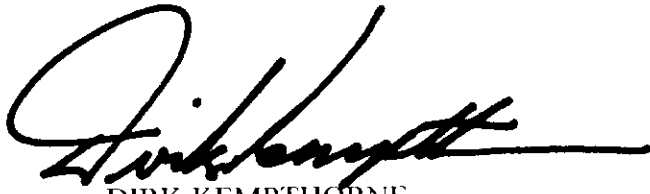
As noted in the enclosed summary, settlement legislation requires provisions and funding to settle all existing and potential individual and tribal claims for trust accounting, cash and land mismanagement, and other related claims, along with the resolution of other related matters (e.g., trust reform, IT security, etc.) that otherwise burden the lands at issue and permit recurrence of such highly disruptive litigation. Because it will enhance the value of these lands to their Indian owners, we expect that the package would create benefits greatly exceeding the dollars to be expended.

Over the past few months, we have benefited greatly from the discussions we have had with the majority and minority staff on the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. We look forward to continuing our work with Congress to help usher in a new era of independence and prosperity for Indian landowners and tribes and a future relationship with Indian Country that reflects our commitments to self-governance and self-determination.

Please let us know how we can assist you, Vice-Chairman Thomas, and Chairman Rahall and Ranking Member Young of the House Natural Resources Committee, with this important legislative initiative. Similar letters have been addressed to them and Senator McCain.

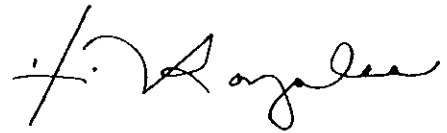
Again, thank you for your continued support on this matter.

The Office of Management and Budget advises that it does not object to enactment of legislation that is consistent with this letter and the enclosed summary entitled "Key Facets of Acceptable Indian Trust Reform and Settlement Legislation."



DIRK KEMPTHORNE
Secretary of the Interior

Sincerely,



ALBERTO R. GONZALES
Attorney General

Enclosure