

For Immediate Release  
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## **DORGAN SAYS BUSH ADMINISTRATION OFFERS \$7 BILLION TO SETTLE SUIT OVER MISMANAGEMENT OF INDIAN TRUST FUNDS**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND), Chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee said Monday Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne have notified him in writing the administration is offering up to \$7 billion to settle lawsuits involving over a century of mismanagement of Indian trust fund accounts.

At issue is a suit filed by Elouise Cobell in 1996 against the Department of Interior. It seeks an accounting for well over a century of systematic mismanagement of Indian trust accounts by the department.

Under terms of the offer, the federal government would pay \$7 billion over ten years, without interest. In exchange, all tribal and individual claims for mismanagement of the Indian trust fund accounts against the federal government would be dropped.

“This is the first time that the federal government has acknowledged a multi-billion dollar liability for the mismanagement of the Indian trust funds over the past century and more. That is a significant admission,” Dorgan said.

“The conditions the administration has attached to the settlement offer are going to be very controversial,” he said.

Dorgan said he will conduct a hearing on the settlement offer later this month to give the Attorney General and Secretary of Interior an opportunity to “publicly discuss the origin of the settlement offer and to explain its details.” He said plaintiffs would also be invited to take part in the hearing and to react publicly to the settlement offer. He will also invite witnesses from other tribal and Indian interests to present testimony on the settlement offer.

Ultimately, Congress must enact legislation to fund any settlement of the case.

The federal government is currently spending over \$60 million a year to defend itself from the lawsuit and has spent more than \$300 million in that effort.

“It is the role of Congress to ensure that the process is transparent, and that all issues are discussed openly and publicly discussed. I believe that will help ensure fairness for the plaintiffs and help bring closure for the federal government.”