

INTERTRIBAL MONITORING ASSOCIATION on Indian Trust Funds

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LETTER BY FAX

The Honorable Gale Norton
Secretary of Interior
1849 C Street SW - Interior Building
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Secretary Norton:

Last week, the Intertribal Monitoring Association on Indian Trust Funds ("ITMA"), the representative organization of 64 federally recognized tribes, held an emergency membership meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico on a variety of trust reform issues. Among others, our member Tribes raised as a priority matter the need to appoint an Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior.

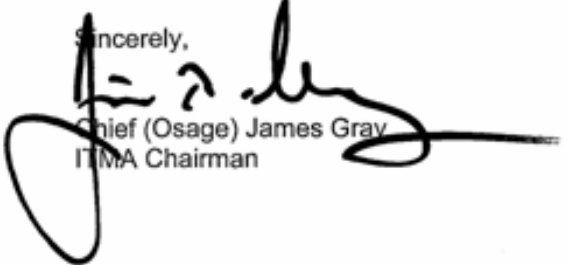
ITMA member Tribes, and Indian country in general, are deeply concerned that the appointment and retention of an Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs appears to be a low priority for the Bush Administration. The Administration's first appointee, Neal McCaleb, only served 19 months before resigning. Ten months later, Dave Anderson was nominated to fill this post and only served 16 months before announcing his resignation. During the five-year tenure of the Bush Administration, these two individuals who were duly nominated and confirmed by the Senate to be the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, served a combined time of less than three years, leaving a more than two-year void when the Department lacked a permanent and active leader for Indian affairs.

ITMA believes the absence of an Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs has had and will continue to have an adverse impact on policy and budgetary and other important considerations affecting Indian country. Nearly a year later, Indian country appears to have little to no information on the nomination process for this extremely important position.

Further, we believe the Administration, Congress and Indian country are at a critical juncture with respect to the interplay between the Department of the Interior's trust reform regulatory and policy initiatives, pending trust reform legislation, and the *Cobell* litigation as well numerous trust fund related cases filed by Indian tribes. In the continued absence of a permanent and active Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, we fear the Administration's commitment to Indian affairs will be viewed with skepticism by Tribal leaders. Similarly, we fear Congress has and will continue to interpret the lack of

an Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs as an expression of the Administration's lack of support for our critical issues.

In closing, we trust that you will take serious our concerns and relay them to the powers that be in the White House to make a selection as soon as practicably possible.

Sincerely,

Chief (Osage) James Gray
ITMA Chairman

cc: ITMA Tribal Membership
ITMA Board of Directors