

Statement of Ben Nighthorse Campbell
Hearing on Legislation to Reform the Indian Trust Fund System
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
September 22, 1999

Good morning. The Committee will come to order. Last Wednesday I introduced 3 bills to provide needed reforms to the management of Indian trust funds. These 3 bills, together with legislation I co-sponsored with Senator Murkowski earlier this year (S.739) will comprehensively address all aspects of Indian trust reform.

It is the obligation of this Committee and this Congress to do all we can to make sure the Federal government upholds its trust obligation to Indian tribes and Indian people.

For that reason, for the past 3 years this Committee held oversight hearings on the Department's plan to reform Indian trust management.

Without exception every witness we heard from other than the Department: Tribal leaders; trust lawyers and experts, the General Accounting Office, and Paul Homan, the former Special Trustee for American Indians, all testified that this plan for reform *will not work*.

The Department's response has been consistent: "Trust Us".

I believe the Indians are owed more than promises that they will receive justice. Enough is enough.

Today it is my hope that we begin to lay the foundation for long-term and permanent trust reforms by receiving testimony on bills to require the Special Trustee to focus on data cleanup and internal controls; and also to create an inter-agency commission to make recommendations over specific reforms and which agency ought to carry those reforms out.

Let me say that I am deeply disappointed in reading the Secretary's testimony which once again puts a "happy face" on the Department's trust reform efforts. For 3 years now, timetables

for implementation have been delayed and progress has not been encouraging to the point that Indian country is being asked to “Trust the Department’s Plan”.

I believe there are alternatives and that these measures represent rational and reasonable proposals to begin to bring this issue to closure.

With that I look forward to hearing from today’s witnesses.