

**Opening Statement**  
**Senator Kent Conrad**  
**Oversight Hearing on Implementation of**  
**Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act**  
**February 13, 2002**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this oversight hearing to discuss the implementation of the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act, commonly known as NAHASDA.

Native Americans face some of the worst housing conditions in the United States, and overcrowding is common. In North Dakota, where winter daytime temperatures generally do not rise above freezing — and in fact are often sub-zero — a person who lacks solid, well-insulated housing is at risk of serious injury and possibly even death. Yet we are asking many Indian people in North Dakota and throughout the United States to make due with substandard housing.

I am pleased that in 1996, Congress passed NAHASDA, which allows tribal housing authorities greater autonomy to design housing plans that suit their needs. NAHASDA block grants are a more efficient way of providing funding for housing in Indian country. As the title of the 1996 act indicates, self-determination is a core principle of the law. NAHASDA points to local control and local solutions to address the housing crisis facing so many in Indian country.

As this committee works on the reauthorization of NAHASDA, one area that should be examined is whether an emergency reserve fund should be created. This past year it was discovered that over 200 homes on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in my state of North Dakota were infested with black mold, caused by the extraordinarily wet conditions in that part of the State.

Black mold can be life-threatening, especially to the very young and the very old with respiratory problems. It has caused very serious health problems to those occupying these houses on the reservation. In fact, two children have already died in these homes. Many of the homes are simply uninhabitable due to the extreme mold infestation in the basements, walls, ceilings, and insulation. Other tribes in North Dakota, including the Spirit Lake Nation and the Three Affiliated Tribes at Fort Berthold, are also battling mold-infested homes.

As we worked to find a way to replace the homes impacted at Turtle Mountain, we discovered that there is no emergency fund for Native American housing, as there is for public housing. As a result, we had to secure funding to address this emergency through other means.

It is my hope that we can address some of the issues, like the lack of an emergency fund, that have become apparent as NAHASDA has been implemented and make this good law even better. I look forward to the testimony of today's witnesses, and thank them for being here.

