

**Prepared Statement of Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell
Vice Chairman - Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
Legislative Hearing on the “Five Nations Indian Land Reform Act”**

September 18, 2002

Good morning and thank you Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank Chairman Inouye for holding this important hearing.

As all in this room know, the so-called “Five Civilized Tribes” were forcibly removed from the Southeastern portion of the United States against their wishes and large tracts of land were set aside in an area known then as “Indian Territory” and known today as the State of Oklahoma.

Like other Indian reservations, the Five Tribes’ reservations were subjected to the allotment policy of the late 1880s. However, Congress went even further when it allotted these Indian reservations by giving state courts jurisdiction over these lands.

One Federal Court referred to this system as “fatally flawed” and most of the people who have looked at this situation agree with that judge’s criticism.

Through H.R. 2880, the “Five Nations Indian Land Reform Act,” Congress has the opportunity to correct a number of past errors and afford Indian lands in Eastern Oklahoma the same protection afforded to other Indian lands.

In addition to the Committee staff, I would like to commend the efforts of the Oklahoma Tribes and the entire Oklahoma Congressional delegation, but especially Congressman Wes Watkins and Senator Inhofe, who have provided the leadership on this complicated, but worthwhile effort.

With that I look forward to hearing from our witnesses Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

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