

Prepared Statement of Ben Nighthorse Campbell
Chairman, Committee on Indian Affairs
United States Senate
Hearing on the Bureau of Indian Affairs Capacity and Mission
April 28, 1999

Good morning. The Committee on Indian Affairs will come to order. Today we will begin the long process of taking a frank look at the Bureau of Indian Affairs, reviewing what the BIA is being asked to do by Congress and, just as important, what it is capable of doing. We will also discuss whether the present role of the BIA is appropriate for the current state of Indian Country.

As the agency charged with primary responsibility for carrying out the United States' trust responsibility to Indian tribes, the BIA has continuing obligations to protect Indian assets and Indian people. We are here today to find out how, if at all, those obligations have changed since the 1970's, when President Nixon initiated Tribal Self Determination.

As of this year, *more than 1/3* of all Indian tribes operate under "self governance" compacts. They perform services for their members that used to be managed entirely by the federal government, such as health care, law enforcement and natural resource protection.

Self Governance allows tribes to administer federal programs and services provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service, and has resulted in higher quality services, more skilled tribal personnel, and political and economic self determination among tribes. I believe everyone here would agree self-determination has been the government's most successful policy toward Indian Tribes.

At the same time, as more tribes enter Self Governance, we are hearing from the agencies and from our colleagues that Self Governance and the withdrawal of resources is having an impact on the residual capabilities of the Bureau to remain viable and to continue to provide services. Today we are asking what the BIA's mission should be in this new era for tribal governments. Should it be a service provider? Should it be strictly a technical assistance provider? Can it continue to be both?

From the first days of its existence, the Bureau has been analyzed and reorganized numerous times. That is not the sign of failure. A good government is responsive to the changing needs of its people. Indian country and the Bureau are at a cross-roads. I hope to hear from the witnesses their views on what will the BIA's mission should be in the years ahead, and what resources are required to fulfill these obligations.