

Statement of U.S. Senator Craig Thomas

Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

Legislative Proposals relating to the statute of limitations on claims against the United States related to the management of Indian tribal trust fund accounts

February 7, 2001

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me begin by saying it is important for this Committee to remain interested and involved with Indian trust management issues. Throughout my time in Congress and as a member of this Committee, I have been involved with efforts to remedy the existing problems with the current management system. It continues to be my hope that we can develop a dependable system.

As we are all aware, the Cobell v. Norton litigation has prompted an intense reevaluation of our government's trust responsibility. Consequently, Secretary Norton has put forth a proposal to restructure the Bureau of Indian Affairs, thereby creating a new agency solely charged with managing Indian trust accounts. I understand this proposal has been met with opposition throughout areas in Indian Country. I also understand the tribes' frustration with the Department's consultation process. However, I strongly believe that we must not lose focus in our efforts to resolve this long-standing problem and move forward to establish an accountable system of trust management.

The Department of Interior is not the only agency to bear the burden of

finding a solution or addressing the problem. Each branch of our government continues to shape the future outcome of Indian trust management. We are here today to discuss one of the many issues surrounding trust reform. The history of mismanagement must be eradicated and replaced with a renewed commitment to providing a fair, accountable system. I look forward to working with my colleagues as we proceed in this difficult task.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.