

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 21, 2010

Hon. Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
The Capitol, Room H-232
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

We have an historic opportunity to rectify an injustice that has persisted for well over a century by ratifying the *Cobell v. Salazar* settlement agreement. The *Cobell* suit alleged that the federal government, in its role as trustee, failed to pay billions of dollars in royalties to Indians who own land or mineral rights. On December 8, 2009, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced a settlement in the case that would pay \$1.4 billion to Individual Indian Money account holders and set up a \$2 billion fund to buy back fractionated land for Indian tribes. We respectfully request that the House consider legislation to finalize the settlement soon so that we can begin to address this legacy of neglect by the federal government in Indian Country.

Since the enactment of the General Allotment Act in 1887, the federal government has acted as trustee for land removed from communal tribal ownership and allotted to individual Indians in an effort to weaken tribal communities and familial relationships. As trustee, the federal government was supposed to lease land and mineral rights for the benefit of Indian owners and pay those owners royalties collected on their behalf. Instead, those funds were frequently mishandled or even lost. After decades of neglect by the federal government, these owners resorted to a lawsuit to force the government to account for lost and misdirected royalties. It is this suit that the Cobell Settlement will bring to an end. The payments to individual account holders will help make up for lost royalties, while the Trust Land Consolidation Fund will enhance tribal sovereignty by purchasing fractionated allotted lands, which are often difficult to manage, and returning them to tribal control.

This settlement is an important first step in accounting for past misdeeds of our country against Native people. A similar suit on behalf of tribes, rather than individuals, is still pending in federal court. We urge you to continue this Congress' commitment to justice for Native citizens by taking action on the Cobell settlement soon.

Sincerely,



MARTIN HEINRICH
Member of Congress



HARRY TEAGUE
Member of Congress



BEN RAY LUJÁN
Member of Congress

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