

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Resources
Washington, DC 20515

September 30, 2003

The Honorable Charles Taylor
Chairman
House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee
B-308 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Taylor:

I am writing to express my strong support for the Trust Reform Demonstration Project for self-governance tribes that was included as Section 134 of S. 1391, the fiscal year 2004 Senate Interior Appropriations bill.

As you know, several tribes have contracted out their trust management systems through the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. Recognizing that the federal government's trust responsibility does not require daily control over the management of tribes' resources, these tribes have taken the initiative to use the Self-Determination Act to develop constructive relationships and agreements with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to allow them to manage their own trust resources consistent with federal law, in adherence to agreed upon tribal/federal management standards, and in accordance with their own priorities and needs. The successful systems that have been established by these tribes benefit the tribes as well as the Department of the Interior (DOI). Their continued operation should be encouraged.

The Trust Reform Demonstration Project would allow ten tribes to continue their successful trust management systems as they currently exist. This would allow the preservation of successful trust management systems while wholesale trust reform within the DOI is evaluated. For example, one of the tribes that would participate in this demonstration project, the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community (SRPMIC), operates a very successful trust management system that has now become a model in the trust reform debate. The tribe is so efficient that it can turn around checks in one week while it would take the Department a year or more to issue the same checks. With the operation of others in this demonstration project, DOI and Congress could learn of the successes and failures of the various systems so as to successfully reform the broken trust system.

Unfortunately, every year, tribes that operate their own trust management systems must apply to the DOI for a waiver to allow them to operate their systems. Without approval of the waiver, tribes have the potential to lose valuable funding. This language would allow tribes to

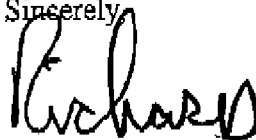
continue operating their systems for another year without applying to the Department for a waiver while DOI continues to work on overall trust reform.

Finally, there are no costs associated with this demonstration project. Monies appropriated to the participating tribes and their respective BIA offices for trust resources management will be appropriated in fiscal year 2004 in the same manner as they were in fiscal year 2003.

Again, I urge you to include the Trust Reform Demonstration Project report language that was included as Section 134 of S. 1391 in the joint House-Senate conference.

Thank you for attention to this important matter. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me, or have your staff call Chris Fluhr of my staff, at x5-6523.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard W. Pombo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "R" at the beginning.

Richard W. Pombo
Chairman