

Letter: Trust fund case rebuttal

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Your recent article, "Trust fund case deadlocked" (Vol. 25, Iss. 28), about the *Cobell v. Norton* Indian trust case and the hearing held before the House of Representatives Committee on Resources to craft legislation for a solution, included some errors that need correction. For example, you say that the accounting of Indian trust funds performed by the Department of the Interior to date did not "take place for any time period prior to 1994." This is incorrect. We are accounting for funds in individual Indian accounts that were open on or after 1994. A large percentage of all accounts open at that time date back many decades, and our accounting activities include those historic transactions.

You also repeat the plaintiff's accusation that "there are so many records destroyed they know it is impossible to come up with an accounting." Not so. While there was a time when we did not know the extent of the records available, for the last number of years, we have been systematically gathering, imaging, and storing Indian trust records from federal agencies, tribes, and individuals across the country. We have built one of the most advanced records storage and research facilities in the world, the American Indians Records Repository.

To date, we have nearly a quarter of a billion pages of records stored at the AIRR - and more boxes arrive every day. So far, we have found that we have enough records to perform an accurate historical accounting to find out how funds collected were distributed to beneficiaries. And leading experts from a number of major accounting firms and the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago agree.

The lawsuit has brought a lot of necessary attention to the issues surrounding the Indian trust, and we appreciate that. We would ask that anyone involved recognize that things are not the same as they were at the beginning of this case. Every day, Interior's Office of Historical Trust Accounting images and logs more historic records for Indian beneficiaries. To discount this work and data is detrimental to the process of finding a fair and just solution for all Indian trust beneficiaries - something we all hope can happen sooner rather than later.

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