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the U.S. Congress

Wednesday August 03, 2005

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NEWS

AUGUST 3, 2005

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Account holders needn't worry about Indian Trust

From Ross Swimmer, special trustee for American Indians, U.S. Department of the Interior:

I appreciate The Hill's editorial comment about the recent Senate Indian Affairs Committee hearing on legislation to resolve the long-running Cobell v. Norton litigation and address the management of the Indian Trust ("Righting an old wrong," July 28). The lawsuit and issues surrounding the Indian Trust are serious concerns in Indian Country and in this administration, and they deserve attention. However your editorial begs for some clarification.

You say that the litigation is "a nine-year court battle over the government's admitted mismanagement of Native American Trust Funds accounts." While the Department of the Interior has admitted that some aspects of the trust need improvement, the lawsuit does not allege mismanagement or demand reparations. It is only to account for the Indian Trust funds collected and distributed to individual Indian beneficiaries.

To date, our findings show that over the course of the last century the Indian Affairs employees across the nation — most of whom are American Indians — did collect and distribute funds to Indian Trust account holders and did, in good faith, keep records to support trust fund management activities.

Finally, your editorial didn't report information that is paramount to today's Indian Trust account holders. As I testified at that same Senate hearing, Interior's staff members and tribal leaders have been hard at work improving and modernizing the management of the trust for the benefit of Native Americans across the nation.

Today, our accounting systems are the same as those used in major private trust corporations and are audited every year. For the first time, beneficiaries have staff members available to them who are dedicated to trust matters and provide account information and problem resolution. These new trust officers are trained in fiduciary trust management and are stationed at offices across Indian

Country.

Beneficiaries are provided with quarterly financial statements, and we are beginning to issue new quarterly asset statements that include comprehensive information such as leaseholder information, land use and more. Staff and tribal leaders are also working on solutions to other long-standing problems such as the extreme division, or "fractionation," of trust land when it gets passed down to heirs.

These are just a few of the reforms in place, and I am proud to work with Interior staff, Indian leaders, individual Indians, and Congress on reforming the trust to better serve the Indian people.
Washington, D.C.

Frist chose gun industry over saving lives

From Don C. Reed:

Regarding your July 25 story "Final week is tight for Senator Frist"), as the father of a paralyzed son, I am perhaps less patient than I should be with political maneuvering, especially that which blocks stem cell research.

But I find it frustrating that Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist [R-Tenn.] should give preference to the gun lobby over literally millions of Americans suffering with chronic disease, which stem cell research might alleviate or even cure.

The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act (H.R. 810) could save lives; the gun manufacturers wish to avoid lawsuits deriving from their death-dealing tools. They have a valid point to make, and the right to be heard but which is more important for the Senate to consider first?

Sen. Frist made a bad choice this week; let us hope he does better when the Senate reconvenes.
Fremont, Calif.

Goddard massaged McLuhan's message

From J.B. Keena:

I hate to take issue with an otherwise well-written piece by Ben Goddard, but in his July 28 column ("As technology gets smarter, so will media buys") he incorrectly attributes to the late Marshall McLuhan the quote, "the medium is the message."

In fact, McLuhan, as evidenced by the actual title of his book *The Medium is the Message* [FYI: 'Message' is not misspelled], was a master at aphorisms. Perhaps alluding to this, he was once quoted as saying, "We shape our tools and they in turn shape us." Like it or not, television, the Internet, print and radio continue to massage