



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

MAY 20 2011

The Honorable Daniel Akaka
Chairman, Committee on Indian Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to provide you with the Department of the Interior's views on S. 676, a bill to amend the Act of June 18, 1934, to reaffirm the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to take land into trust for Indian tribes, which the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs reported, with an amendment, on April 7, 2011. The Department strongly supports the introduced version of the legislation, and it is our hope that the Senate will advance the introduced version of the bill.

The legislation would address the impact of the United States Supreme Court's decision in *Carcieri v. Salazar* by confirming the Department of the Interior's authority to acquire land in trust for federally recognized tribes pursuant to the Indian Reorganization Act. There is, no doubt, a great need for this legislation.

Taking land into trust is one of the most important functions that the Department undertakes on behalf of Indian tribes. Homelands are essential to the health, safety, and welfare of the First Americans. There is an unfortunate tendency to link the issue of taking land into trust, and this legislation, to Indian gaming. The fact is, this issue and this legislation go far beyond the issue of Indian gaming. The land-into-trust applications processed by the Department are designed to further tribal self-determination. These lands provide a means for tribal communities to practice their cultural traditions, to provide housing for tribal members, and to engage in economic development. Moreover, the majority of these applications have no connection to Indian gaming. I continue to believe that this Department's ongoing activities to establish, consolidate and, where appropriate, expand tribal homelands is an essential feature of our Nation's Indian policy and our honoring of principles of tribal self-reliance and self-governance.

Your leadership and initiative on this important issue are greatly appreciated. I look forward to working with you in continued support of Indian tribes, and I also look forward to enactment of this legislation to address the uncertainty created by the *Carcieri* decision.

Sincerely,


Ken Salazar