



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Dan Burton  
Chairman, Committee on  
Government Reform  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

SEP 30 2002

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In November 2001 the General Accounting Office (GAO) issued its report entitled "Improvements Needed in Tribal Recognition Process" (Report). Pursuant to 31 U.S.C. 720, we are submitting to the House Committee on Government Reform and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, this written statement of actions that we have taken and will take on the GAO recommendations.

The GAO recommended that Federal acknowledgment decisions made in the regulatory process of the Department be more (1) predictable and (2) timely. We concur with these two general recommendations. The GAO accepted the existence of an acknowledgment process within the Department, but suggested that improvements be made to that process.

We developed a strategic plan to make acknowledgment precedents more accessible and to provide clearer guidelines to the regulations in order to ensure consistency and to improve public understanding of acknowledgment decisions. We completed an analysis of the workload and needs assessment for the Branch of Acknowledgment and Research. Lastly, we developed a strategic action plan for procedural and other changes that will result in more timely decisions.

We share the goal of improving this important Federal function to better serve Indian tribes.

Sincerely,

Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs

Enclosure

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The Honorable David M. Walker, Comptroller General of the United States