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Statement of the Hon. Don Young of Alaska
Chairman, Subcommittee on Indian and Alaska Native Affairs
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1272

March 1, 2012

H.R. 1272, the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Judgment Fund Distribution Act of 2011, authorizes the distribution of funds that belong to the six bands of Indian tribes that make up the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. This bill does not concern any new or pending Indian claim, it does not cost any taxpayer money, and it does not create a new federal program. H.R. 1272 resolves an issue that has been pending in some form since 1948 when the first of several claims were filed by all the Chippewa Bands in Minnesota except the Red Lake Band, regarding federal mismanagement of Chippewa lands and resources.

The judgment funds concerned in this bill are currently held in trust by the Secretary of the Interior. The tribes and tribal members to whom the money legally belongs have not been able to collect the funds for many years, largely because of disagreement from one of the Bands of Indians over its distribution.

Unfortunately, the applicable law that provides for the distribution of tribal claims judgment fund awards has failed. Congress no doubt had good intentions when it wrote the Indian Tribal Judgment Funds Use or Distribution Act in 1973, but the complex process it established did not work in the present case, and it appears legal deadlines during which the funds were supposed to be paid to the Chippewa Bands have been missed.

This legislation sponsored by the Gentlemen from Minnesota, Mr. Peterson and Mr. Cravaack, will bring finality to a long saga involving Minnesota Chippewa Indian claims and I'm pleased to be able to hold a hearing on this important bill today.