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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
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Statement of the Hon. Don Young of Alaska
Chairman, Subcommittee on Indian and Alaska Native Affairs
"Oversight Hearing on FY 2013 Budget Request of the
Indian Health Service and the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians"
March 6, 2012

Today, we are here to review the President's Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Request for the Indian Health Service and the Office of Special Trustee for American Indians. As we all know, the federal government has a trust responsibility to provide health care services for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

The Indian Health Service, either directly or through compacts and funding agreements with tribes, provides comprehensive primary health care services to approximately 2.1 million Native Americans.

On large land-based Indian Reservations and in the vast majority of Alaska Native Villages, there are no health care services available other than what is provided through the Indian Health Care Improvement Act.

It is – literally – a life-line for Native Americans, who as a population suffer from extraordinarily high rates of diabetes, substance abuse, and other ailments associated with life in rural areas where federal laws and policies have created joblessness, skyrocketing energy prices, and fragile economies.

Over the years, we have witnessed increases to the President's budget request and for FY 2013 the President is requesting \$4.4 billion, an increase of \$116 million over the FY 2012 enacted level. The increased budget accounts for funding six newly constructed health centers, including Joint Venture projects.

The testimony we are about to receive will highlight obstacles or additional needs which prevent tribes from providing adequate health care for their members.

Turning briefly to the Office of the Special Trustee, this agency acts as the financial manager for \$3.7 billion of funds held in trust for the benefit of Indians. Most of these funds are derived from the use and leasing of Indian trust lands, and from judgment awards and special payments.

While its budget is not very large as government agencies go, OST's statutory trust duties are enormous. While I have every confidence the Acting Deputy Special Trustee appearing here today is very capable, I am troubled that the President since he took office has not appointed, with the advice and consent of the Senate, a Special Trustee as required by law.

I look forward to hearing the testimony of the witnesses today and the questions Members have. I now recognize the Ranking Member for any statement he may have.