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The Honorable Gale A. Norton
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Madam Secretary:

In recent days, there have been news reports about a letter purportedly written by an attorney in your Department relative to the ongoing Oneida Indian land claim negotiations in New York State and the extent of participation, or lack thereof, by the U.S. government. As the Member of Congress representing a majority of the land claim area, I was greatly dismayed, and frankly angry, to learn in this manner the alleged position of the federal government – that it will not contribute \$250 million as discussed in the settlement framework announced in early 2002.

The mere fact that, apparently, a single source sent such a definitive and inflammatory opinion to the court-appointed mediator is less than helpful. Already there are comments from local officials and others expressing the view that all hope for the negotiations has been destroyed because of the federal government's position in this matter. Whatever the intentions of the letter writer, the net effect has been to derail what little progress there has been to date and make the favorable prospects of future negotiations even less likely. I am enclosing sample news stories for your information.

I hope, Madam Secretary, that you would not endorse such a destructive and foolish approach.

While I understand there is a court-ordered confidentiality agreement, now that the issue has become fodder for the newspapers, I believe it is incumbent upon you to immediately provide me with information relating to the government's position on financial participation in this case and its justification for such a position. Certainly, there is ample precedent for monetary contributions to land claim settlements by the U.S. government and I can see no valid reason for that precedent not to apply in this instance.

I anticipate hearing from you in the very near future.

Sincerely yours,

John M. McHugh
Member of Congress