



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Opening Statement of Sen. Chuck Grassley
Hearing, "Indian Jails: A Clarion Call for Reform"
Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2004

This is a great day for Native Americans as they and all Americans celebrate the opening of the new museum on the Mall devoted to honoring American Indian culture. Unfortunately, while it is a great day for many, it is not the case for those individuals in the government given the very important charge and responsibility of ensuring that prisoners in Indian Country jails are treated humanely. If we didn't know it already, recent events in Iraq have reminded us all that our country's commitment to human rights and to fair and proper treatment of individuals is measured, in part, by how we treat those who are incarcerated.

Today's report from the Inspector General of Interior, Earl Devaney, is very troubling. To be honest, in more than 20 years of conducting oversight I can hardly recall a government report that has been so hard-hitting and exposed such a level of government waste and mismanagement. I commend you, Mr. Devaney, and your staff for your efforts.

I think the IG has it exactly right when he says these jails are a national disgrace. The IG notes that the conditions are often worse than those in third world countries. Once again our government has failed to uphold its responsibilities to Native Americans. And let me make clear, like so many problems I've done oversight on over the years, this is not a problem of this administration, or the previous administration – this is a problem of an entrenched bureaucracy that isn't getting the job done. We need to look at new ways to solving this problem.

Let me close by saying that just as it took great determination, hard work and resolve by American Indians to bring us this great new museum on the mall, it will take a similar, if not greater, effort by the federal government to end this national disgrace.