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Washington, D.C. - Today, the Departments of Justice, Interior and Agriculture applauded the bipartisan House passage of the Claims Settlement Act. The Act, which recently passed the Senate, will provide long-awaited funding for the agreements reached in the Pigford II lawsuit, brought by African American farmers; the Cobell lawsuit, brought by Native Americans over the management of Indian trust accounts and resources; and four separate water rights suits made by Native American tribes. President Obama has said that he will sign the legislation into law.

“These are truly historic settlements that do not only resolve litigation, but also offer a new relationship between many deserving Americans and the federal agencies that play an important role in their lives,” said Attorney General Eric Holder. “Bringing this litigation to a close has been a priority for this Administration, and today’s vote in Congress is a significant, historic achievement. These cases provide fair deals for the plaintiffs and for the American taxpayers.”

“Congress’ approval of the Cobell settlement and the four Indian water rights settlements is nothing short of historic for Indian nations,” Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar said. “The settlements honorably and responsibly address long-standing injustices and represent a major step forward in President Obama’s agenda to empower tribal governments, fulfill our trust responsibilities to tribal members and help tribal leaders build safer, stronger, healthier and more prosperous communities.”

“President Obama and I made a firm commitment not only to treat all farmers fairly and equally, but to right the wrongs in USDA's past,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “I applaud those who took this historic step to ensure black farmers who faced discrimination by their government finally receive justice. And I commend those who led this fight in the U.S. Congress and I am thankful for their unwavering determination. Today’s vote will help the Department of Agriculture move beyond this sad chapter in history. The bill that passed the Senate and House includes strong protections against waste, fraud, and abuse to ensure integrity of the claims process. In the months and years ahead, we will not stop working to move the Department into a new era as a model employer and premier service provider. We also must continue the good work we started to resolve all remaining administrative claims.”