d. Babbitt Responds to McCain's July 1996 Correspondence

The Interior Department's response to Sen. McCain came in the form of a two-page letter dated Aug. 30 from Babbitt, with attachments consisting of memos by Solicitor Leshy and Special Assistant Sibbison. The Sibbison memo, dated Aug. 29, described the basics of the internal DOI decision-making process on Hudson, and answered most of the questions posed in McCain's July 19 letter, but omitted at least two White House contacts that she says she did not recall at that time. The Leshy memo, also dated Aug. 29, defended the Department and its spokeswoman against the assertions of McCain's July 25 letter, analyzing Judge Crabb's ruling in such a way as to bolster the DOI assertion of vindication.

The two-page letter Babbitt signed ultimately became a focal point of this controversy because of assertions it made about Babbitt's dealings with Eckstein and Ickes. Babbitt's letter first stated that the Wall Street Journal article "falsely insinuated that this Department has allowed campaign contributions to dictate Indian policy." It further provided that the attached two memoranda "answer most of the questions you ask." Babbitt then wrote:

> Your letter also inquired about communications directly involving me. I have no recollection of being contacted by attorney Patrick O'Connor on this matter, nor do I recall ever being informed by anyone in the Executive Office of the President of Mr. O'Connor's involvement. Further, like members of my staff, I did not learn of the April 25, 1996 [sic] letter from the Director of the Minnesota Indian Gaming Commission [sic] until well after the decision on the trust land application was made, and I had no knowledge of any meetings, memoranda, telephone calls or any other communications between Executive Office persons and tribal representatives opposed to the acquisition discussed in your July 19 letter.
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> I met with Mr. Paul Eckstein, an attorney for the three tribes applying for the trust land acquisition, shortly before a decision was made on the application. Following this conversation, I instructed my staff to give Mr. Eckstein the opportunity to discuss the matter with John Duffy. I must regretfully dispute Mr.