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NATIVE LANGUAGE BILL GOES TO PRESIDENT BUSH
NAVAJO NATION EDUCATION COMMITTEE PLAYS KEY ROLE IN PASSAGE

This past week, the U.S. Senate passed H.R. 4766, the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Act of 2006. This legislation will expand the current Native language grant program at the Administration for Native Americans at the Department of Health and Human Services to include funding for language survival schools, language nests, and language restoration programs. This legislation, which had passed the House in September, will now be presented to President Bush for his signature.

“H.R. 4766 substantially expands the existing Federal grant program that supports Native language initiatives and will, therefore, play a critical role in our efforts to maintain the vitality of our languages,” stated Navajo Nation Council Education Committee Chairman Leonard Chee. **“We are seeing a rapid decline in the usage of our language among our younger generation. By taking action now we can preserve our language by working with the public school systems.”**

Chairman Chee noted, **“The Education Committee provided testimony and actively lobbied for passage of this legislation , including using the services of our lobbyist in Washington in this effort. We also thank Florian Johnson with the Window Rock Unified School District, who worked with us extensively.”**

After passage of H.R. 4766 in the House in September, it was unclear if the Senate would act on the bill. Several Senators had expressed concerns. However, much of the resistance was overcome by the work of Navajo Code Talkers Samuel Tso, Keith Little and Merrill Sandovil who met with several objecting Senate offices to discuss H.R.4766 and request their support for the bill.

Chairman Chee noted, **“The Codetalkers were called into action for one more mission – this time working to save the languages that did so much to bring victory to the United States during World War II. They did an outstanding job. Our debt of gratitude to them continues.”**

Chairman Chee added, **“On behalf of the Committee, I would like to applaud the Congressional leadership who helped make this happen, most of whom represent the Navajo area, including the principal sponsor Representative Heather Wilson (R-NM) and co-sponsors Representatives Rick Renzi (R-AZ), Tom Udall (D-NM), and Steve Pearce (R-NM).”**