



NAVAJO NATION HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

P.O. Box 1689
Window Rock, Navajo Nation (Arizona) 86515
Phone: (928) 871-7436 Fax: (928) 871-7437
www.nnhrc.navajo-nsn.gov

Media Contact: Rachele Todea
rtodea@navajo-nsn.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

April 20, 2011

NNHRC to preserve and protect Navajo voting rights

ST. MICHAELS, Ariz.— To protect and preserve Navajo voting rights, the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission will take the lead for the Navajo Nation legislative branch in the state legislative and congressional redistricting campaign. The initiative is critical since states have been found to practice discrimination.

Navajo Nation Council Speaker Johnny Naize issued the directive on March 31, 2011, after NNHRC met with several Navajo Nation representatives from the Navajo Nation Speaker's office, Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice-President, the Navajo Board of Election Supervisors, Navajo Elections Office, the Navajo Elections Office, and the Navajo Nation Department of Justice.

“As part of the directive, the Commission must actively advocate for the Navajo people to ensure the rights of the Navajo people are appropriately protected in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah 2011 redistricting activities... Current efforts to redistrict voting districts involve race relations as a primary issue,” stated Honorable Naize in a letter.

“The Navajo Nation must be at the table particularly for the State of Arizona,” said NNHRC Executive Director Leonard Gorman.

In 1975, Arizona was determined as a “Section 5” state meaning Arizona is required by law to pre-clear their redistricting proposals with the U.S. Department of Justice or the federal district court for the District of Columbia before the redistricting laws take effect. In Arizona, the U.S. government found that racial discrimination was practiced and required preclearance thereafter.

New Mexico was a Section 5 state in 1975, but was released from that status a year later.

“In that respect having or *having had* Section 5 status becomes a race relation issue,” said Gorman.

-More-

NNHRCs goals include:

- to improve the legislative districting in which the Navajo Nation is located to preserve a majority-minority standard;
- to improve the congressional districting in which the Navajo Nation is located;
- to remain intact in a single legislative district—avoiding cracking;
- to ensure the Navajo peoples’ equal opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice—avoiding dilution; and
- to ensure that Navajo voting rights are protected and preserved—avoiding retrogression.

“Navajo is a critical player for Arizona, New Mexico and Utah,” said Gorman.

Leading this initiative now for the Navajo Nation is necessary to present their redistricting proposals at the onset of the discussion at the state level.

Arizona redistricting commissioners have already entered into discussions about redistricting.

Each state has its own redistricting process. Arizona appoints 5 individuals for its Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission. Utah and New Mexico legislatures form legislative redistricting committees comprised of senators and representatives.

“Every ten years, states redistrict their congressional and legislative districts based on the most recent census data,” said Gorman. “This is why it’s very important that the Navajo people be counted appropriately.”

###