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– JOINT PRESS RELEASE –

Diné leaders speak in support of voting rights
and the Navajo Nation’s proposed redistricting maps
before the Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission

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PHOTO: Speaker Seth Damon, President Jonathan Nez, and Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. attend the virtual public hearing hosted by the Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission.

TWIN ARROWS, Ariz. — During a public hearing hosted by the Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission on Wednesday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Speaker Seth Damon, and Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. provided comments virtually about the importance of protecting and strengthening Native American voting rights, improving access to voting, and supporting redistricting maps proposed by the Navajo Nation.

In January, the commission was established to redraw Arizona’s congressional and legislative districts to reflect the results of the nationwide 2020 Census. In October, the commission adopted draft maps with proposed changes to the current congressional and legislative districts, which will be subject to final consideration on Dec. 22.

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“We have carefully reviewed the proposed maps put forth by the commission, and we are very concerned that the new maps will dilute the voices of the first people of this country and this state. Coming from a long line of strong and resilient ancestors, who were raised through the teachings of our elders, we know what is best for our communities. Our voices must be heard, and our voting rights must be protected and upheld. A fair redistricting process will provide our people the opportunity to elect the candidates of our choice and to hold our congressional and state leaders accountable and to listen to our voices and to recognize and respect tribal sovereignty. With all of that said, we are respectfully requesting the support of the Commission to approve the Navajo Congressional Plan – CDF010,” said President Jonathan Nez.

The President along with Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh) highlighted the challenges and barriers during the 2020 Census that likely led to an undercount of tribal members from rural areas of Arizona.

“The redistricting map must be fair and truly represent the best interest of the Navajo Nation. We must protect the power of the Navajo vote in Arizona and work with the Hopi, White Mountain Apache, San Carlos Apache, Havasupai, and Paiute Nations to hold state leaders accountable. Our representation when choosing elected leaders is important to the Navajo people. We are not part of metropolitan Phoenix and do not share similar interests. Our people have called northern Arizona home since time immemorial – we have been here farming, raising livestock, and consider this region to be sacred land. The independent commission must take into serious consideration our government-to-government relationship and respect our sovereignty as self-governing nations,” said Speaker Seth Damon.

Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission (NNHRC) Executive Director, Leonard Gorman, provided testimony about the importance of complying with the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and maintaining the Native American voting age population in the 60-percent plus range. The NNHRC submitted Congressional Plan - CDF010 as the official map recommendation by Navajo leaders.

“Our Native American people must have equal opportunity to fairly participate in elections,” said Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain). “Precinct voting boundaries need to be clearly defined so there are no questions on where our Navajo people cast their ballots on Election Day. We respectfully request the independent commission to approve the Navajo Congressional Plan - CDF010 which is endorsed by Hopi, White Mountain Apache, San Carlos Apache, Havasupai, and Paiute tribal leaders. The Navajo Nation looks forward to working together to protect the voting rights of our Sovereign Nations.”

Members of the public who would like to submit public comment to the Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission may do so at this link: <https://irc.az.gov/contact-us>

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