



## The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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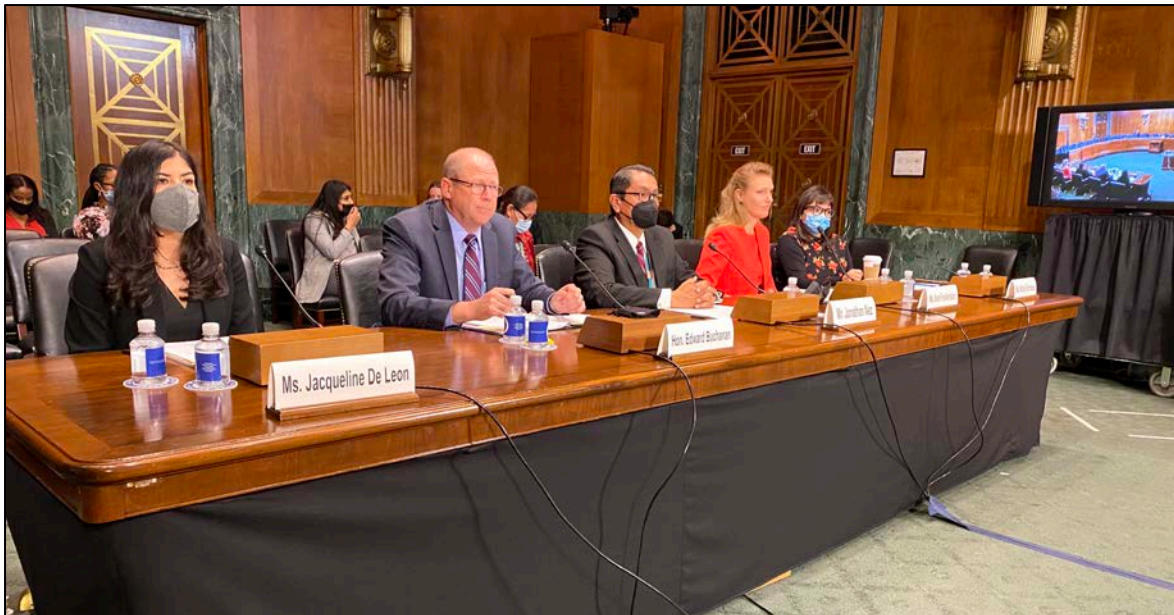
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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## President Nez testifies before Congress in support of Native American voting rights



**PHOTO:** Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez testifies in support of the Native American Voting Rights Act before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary's Subcommittee on the Constitution in Washington D.C. on Oct. 20, 2021.

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — On Wednesday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez testified before Congressional members on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C., in support of Native American voting rights during a hearing titled, “Restoring the Voting Rights Act: Protecting the Native American and Alaska Native Vote.”

President Nez was invited to provide testimony along with Jacqueline De Leon with the Native American Rights Fund, Alaska Federation of Natives Executive Vice President & General Counsel Nicole Borrromeo, Gunderson, Palmer, Nelson & Ashmore, LLP Partner Sara Frankenstein, and Wyoming Secretary of State Edward Buchanan.

“I am here today to protect the right to vote for our children, grandchildren, and future generations. Protecting the Native American vote requires considering the unique challenges faced by Navajo voters. The Nation continues to fight repeated efforts by states and their political subdivisions through restrictive voting laws and policies that impede access to the polls. The Navajo Nation cannot rely on states to provide protections to our right to vote, and therefore calls on Congress to take action. The federal government must fulfill its trust responsibility and safeguard our Navajo citizens’ right to vote,” said President Nez.

His testimony focused on support for the Native American Voting Rights Act, a bill that was recently attached to the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. President Nez also addressed geography, language, institutional barriers, and socio-economic challenges and barriers that impact Navajo voters during elections.

“Many of the citizens of the Navajo Nation live in rural areas and travel long distances to access basic needs and services. Getting to a polling station is often difficult, as transportation options are limited. Our people rely on relatives or clan members for rides because most households only have one vehicle. Travelling to polling places can be particularly burdensome,” President Nez stated.

He also noted that in the 2018 election, some enrolled Navajo Nation members in Arizona had to travel 236 miles roundtrip to participate in early voting. During the 2020 election, some Navajo voters in New Mexico traveled 54-miles to deliver their ballot to the nearest drop box and in the 2018 election, many Navajo voters in Utah drove 392 round trip miles to vote.

Regarding language barriers, President Nez stated that the Navajo language is widely spoken by Navajo voters and it is the primary language for many Navajo people, and also spoke about the lack of rural addressing in many Navajo communities. He also reminded the congressional members that the Navajo language was used by the Navajo Code Talkers to help win World War II and that the Navajo language should be respected at voting polls by allowing Navajo elders access to voting in for and instructions in the Navajo language.

“Navajo is traditionally an oral, not written language, and many Navajos struggle to read, requiring in-person language assistance to cast a ballot. This means that moving to a complete vote-by-mail system would deny Navajo speakers the opportunity to vote,” he added.

The hearing was hosted by the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary’s Subcommittee on the Constitution, chaired by U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) with ranking member Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) in attendance. Sen. Ben Ray Lujan (D-N.M.) and Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) also spoke in support of Native American voting rights during the hearing.

“We thank Chairman Blumenthal for supporting the Native American Voting Rights Act and are grateful for Senator Leahy’s efforts to include the Act in the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. We look forward to working with the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress to fully realize protections for Navajos and all Native Americans who wish to exercise their inherent right to vote in the United States,” said President Nez.

The hearing is available to view online:

<https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/meetings/restoring-the-voting-rights-act-protecting-the-native-american-and-alaska-native-vote>. The full written testimony is available online at:

[https://www.opvp.navajo-nsn.gov/Portals/0/FILES/Latest%20News/2021.10.20\\_Written%20Testimony-Protecting%20the%20Native%20Vote\\_Jonathan%20Nez.pdf](https://www.opvp.navajo-nsn.gov/Portals/0/FILES/Latest%20News/2021.10.20_Written%20Testimony-Protecting%20the%20Native%20Vote_Jonathan%20Nez.pdf).

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