

Navajo Nation Council meets with New York congressman to discuss voting issues

Written by gallupsun

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TSE BONITO, New Mexico — The 25th Navajo Nation Council met with U.S. Congressman Joseph Morelle, D-NY, to discuss concerns and recommendations regarding voting and elections issues to build the congressional record in support of the Native American Voting Rights Act on Feb. 19.

Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain) provided testimony that focused on areas of geographic distance, language and institutional barriers, and socio-economic realities. Curley discussed how issues like public transportation, rural addressing, and out of precinct voting have impacted Navajo voters.

“Protecting the Native American vote means considering the unique challenges faced by Navajo voters,” Curley said. “The Nation has a strong interest in ensuring that Navajo voters have an equal opportunity to participate in the electoral process the same as other U.S. citizens.”

Morelle, a Ranking Member of the House Committee on Administration, is on a week-long trip, visiting tribal communities to examine the barriers that they face in voting. The testimony he is gathering will help to provide insight, context, and examples of the adversity that Native Americans face in voting. The congressman expects to have a hearing regarding the Native American Voting Rights Act early next year.

“One of the most important responsibilities of the House Committee on Administration is addressing voting rights. There has never been a hearing on this bill, and we wanted to commemorate the 100th year of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 with discussions on barriers to voting,” he said.

Members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council who attended the meeting also brought voting issues to the table.

Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock) talked about the challenges that some Navajo voters face in producing valid birth certificates because they were not born in health care facilities. She also mentioned transportation issues, ADA compliance for disabled voters,

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identity theft, and voter fraud.

According to Council Delegate Curtis Yanito (Mexican Water, To'likan, Teenospos, Aneth, Red Mesa), communication for non-English speaking Navajo voters continues to create issues with deadlines and ballot drop-offs.

"Many of our elders forget when they have to mail back their ballots. When they get to the polls they're told their ballots are outdated," he said. "Lack of proper communication is an issue."

Council Delegate Cherilyn Yazzie (Dilcon, Indian Wells, Teesto, Whitecone, Greasewood Springs) brought up concerns about outdated polling equipment and proper staffing at the polls during elections.

"Is there data available regarding the allocation of funds and resources provided to our tribal nations for the purpose of voting?" Yazzie asked.

Council Delegate Shawna Ann Claw (Chinle) agreed that more funding is needed for the purposes of voting and suggested that mobile voting units are brought to the Nation. She reiterated the need to address the communication gap.

"Our elders are the largest voting population, and the language issue is key," Claw said. "There is a lack of translators which leads to issues with elders filling out documents incorrectly."

The 25th Navajo Nation Council thanked Morelle and his staff for meeting with tribal leaders and taking time to visit rural communities to learn more about the challenges that impact access to voting. "Thank you for hearing these issues and viewing the voting landscape of the Navajo Nation," Curley said.

Before meeting with the Navajo Council Delegates in Tse Bonito, Morelle also visited with Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty in Sheep Springs, New Mexico.

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