



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council members express support for election redistricting recommendations for San Juan County, Utah

WINDOW ROCK – Members of the Navajo Nation Council are pleased with the final report issued by the court-appointed Special Master Dr. Bernard Grofman, in which he recommended redistricting maps for the San Juan County Utah Commission and for the San Juan County School Board as directed by the Utah Federal District Court.

In 2011, the Navajo Nation Council recognized the need for redistricting in San Juan County due to the unconstitutional district boundaries and tasked the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission to address the matter. In 2012, the Navajo Nation filed a lawsuit against the county and in 2016 U.S. District Court Judge Robert J. Shelby ruled in favor of the Navajo Nation and ordered the election boundaries to be redrawn.

The report resulted from the court's previous rulings that the county's current school board and county commission election districts violate the Equal Protection clause of the Constitution due to the fact that the districts were previously drawn based on race. The Court appointed the Special Master to assist in redrawing the election districts in a more equitable manner.

In response to the report issued on Wednesday, Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) said he is pleased with the recommendations and that he is hopeful that the federal court will accept the recommendations and conclude the case.

"The maps recommended by Special Master Dr. Grofman respect and protect Navajo peoples' voting rights," said Speaker Bates. "It is important for all counties that serve the Navajo Nation to recognize the need to not only comply with the U.S. Constitution, but also to comply with the Voting Rights Act of 1965."

Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission executive director Leonard Gorman, stated that the process of initiating and litigating the redistricting in San Juan County has been very lengthy in comparison to similar redistricting that has occurred in other states.

The Navajo Nation successfully addressed redistricting in the states of New Mexico and Arizona in 2011, according to Gorman. However, in the state of Utah the process of redistricting has been met with great resistance and concerted efforts to delay the court proceedings.

“It has been a long difficult process, especially when it has now taken six years to litigate the redistricting case. However, it is important to realize, respect and protect the voting rights of Native Americans in all counties on the Navajo Nation,” stated Gorman.

He further noted that the Navajo Nation will be going through the redistricting process again in 2021 for all congressional, legislative, county, school board election districts.

“It is paramount that all Navajos living on the Navajo Nation are counted during the 2020 census count,” added Gorman.

A court hearing is scheduled to receive comments in regards to the final report in the Utah Federal District Court on Dec. 6, and a final court order is anticipated on Dec. 15.

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