

Congressman Silvestre Reyes
Statement in support of H.R. 1560,
To allow the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Tribe to
determine blood quantum requirement for membership

June 22, 2011

Good morning, I would like to thank the Chairman and Ranking Member, and the committee for holding this hearing on my legislation, H.R. 1560, to grant the people of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo the right to determine their own membership. This historic federally-recognized Native American tribe is the oldest community in Texas, and one of only three Native American tribes in the state. The Tribal community, known as “Tigua,” was established in 1682, after the Pueblo Revolt against the Spanish colonization of the Americas, nearly a century before the Declaration of Independence, and more than 160 years before the annexation of Texas to the United States.

For over three centuries, the Tigua have maintained a vibrant presence in my congressional district in El Paso, Texas, and are a central part of our community’s rich culture and heritage. Today, there are nearly 1,700 enrolled members in the Tribe, but without legislative action to correct an injustice that has existed in federal law since 1987, the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo will lose its recognition as a sovereign nation. Due to an unfairly-imposed one-eighth blood quantum requirement by Congress that singles out the Tigua, in the coming generations, they will lose their federally-recognized status, and the right to self-govern their historic community.

Of the 565 federally-recognized Native American tribes in the United States, the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo is one of the very few, if not the only one, whose tribal membership criteria is prescribed by the federal government, and not by the members of the tribe. Every other Native American tribe has the right to determine the criteria of its own membership, based on its unique customs, traditions, and language, in addition to tribal blood. According to a former Tigua governor, the imposed blood quantum requirement was the first time Congress had taken such action since 1946, and it has not done so since. None of the newly-recognized tribes since the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo have been subject to such blood quantum requirements by the federal government.

My legislation corrects this inequity and the singling out of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo. It removes the one-eighth blood quantum requirement in the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo and Alabama Coushatta Indian Tribes of Texas Restoration Act of 1987, and allows the Tigua to determine their own criteria for membership based on its own unique culture, heritage, and traditions.

My legislation has no cost associated with it, and I ask unanimous consent to submit two letters for the record, from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of Health & Human Services, that support this fact.

The Ysleta del Sur Pueblo has been an important part of the community’s cultural heritage for nearly 330 years. The tribe is an inseparable part of our history, and it should be allowed to preserve its status as a sovereign nation for future generations.

As many of you know, I have been deeply committed to correcting this inequity for many years. It has passed this committee and the House under both Republican and Democratic leadership in the 106th Congress and in the previous two Congresses. I appreciate the support that many of you have shown in this effort and in helping to rectifying this inequity.

Passage of this bill and its enactment into law is critical to this historic tribe's survival. By eliminating this unfair tribal enrollment requirement, the Tigua will have the same rights afforded to every other federally-recognized Native American tribe, and will be able to preserve their unique heritage based on shared history, customs, and language, in addition to tribal blood. This bill will ensure the preservation of Texas' oldest community, and the only remaining pueblo in the state. I strongly urge your support of this legislation.