

Statement by Congressman Silvestre Reyes on H.R.1696
A bill to amend the
Ysleta del Sur Pueblo and Alabama and Coushatta Indian Tribes of Texas Restoration Act
to allow the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo tribe to determine blood quantum requirement for
membership in that Tribe
Wednesday, July 11, 2007
10:00 am
1324 Longworth House Office Building

First, I would like to thank my colleagues Chairman Nick Rahall, Ranking Member Don Young, and Members of the Natural Resources Committee for holding this hearing. I would also like to thank my friend, the Governor of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo also known as the Tigua Tribe, the Honorable Art Senclair, for making this trip from El Paso to testify on behalf of this important bill.

I am pleased that H.R. 1696, a bill that will allow the Tigua Tribe to determine their own requirements for membership in the Tribe, is being considered. This legislation would give the Tigua the right to exercise their own tribal sovereignty and self-determination in regard to tribal membership. I believe that passage of this bill is fundamentally an issue of equity and fairness.

Ysleta del Sur Pueblo is the oldest community in Texas and the only pueblo that still exists in the state. It was established in 1681 by refugees from the Pueblo Revolt, an uprising against the Spanish in New Mexico. Spanish missionaries and loyal Tigua Indians settled at El Paso del Norte. By the 1930s, many people thought the Tigua were extinct, but they were not. Instead, in the 1960s, they began asserting themselves and laying claim to their traditional land and resources. In 1968, the state of Texas recognized the Tigua as a tribe. This paved the way for federal recognition in 1987 through an act of Congress, the "Ysleta del Sur Pueblo and Alabama and Coushatta Indian Tribes of Texas Restoration Act." As many of you know, membership eligibility for the Tigua through blood quantum was set in this public law as 1/8th degree or more of Tigua-Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Indian blood.

The Tigua are only one of two American Indian tribes required to go before Congress to change their membership eligibility. The other one is the Yakama Nation of south central Washington state. My bill would simply create parity with the vast majority of Indian nations across our country by allowing the Tigua to determine, through whichever means the Tribe believes to be most appropriate, who is, and who is not, a member of the Tribe. My bill respects the protections afforded to tribes under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) and a tribe's right to exercise self-governance.

Finally, the timing for the passage of this bill could not be more critical. The Tigua are faced with the prospect of rapidly declining numbers of members who meet the requisite blood quantum. Most of the tribal members are elderly and their numbers are quickly declining. Moreover, there is little inter-marriage in the Tribe due to the close lineal relations and the dwindling population appropriate for Tigua marriage. The passage of this bill is needed to continue the existence and viability of the Tribe by adding 857 members to the tribal roll.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I believe it is time for the Tigua Tribe to be given the right to exercise their sovereignty through the determination of their own membership

requirements. Again, I thank you for holding this hearing and look forward to the favorable reporting of this important legislation.

Thank you.